

GADDIS'S RECOGNITIONS: THE MAJOR THEME

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William Gaddis's The Recognitions is a highly praised contemporary American novel. Yet, relatively little has been written about the lengthy and complex masterpiece, as a summary of the criticism indicates. This dissertation, then, introduces the work through a discussion of its major theme, which involves a search for reality, meaning, and salvation. The search explores three principal realms--art, religion, and interpersonal relationships--frequently resulting in profound recognitions. The most pervasive discovery is the counterfeit nature of reality, which may result in either cheapening or perfecting of the rarely perceived genuine.

Chapter two deals with the subject of art, around which the dominant plot revolves. Through art counterfeiting, reality is sought and revealed. On the one hand, deep recognition and redemption of reality is achieved; on the other, self-debasement and entropy result. Even when the genuine is discovered, however, copying entails victimization of the artist. One of the chief forgeries alluded to is The Recognitions itself, which copies (particularly the Faustian legend, Bosch, and the Western Cultural Heritage in general) in an attempt to find its creator's salvation. Gaddis also introduces himself into his novel, as the seemingly minor character Willie, thereby providing keys to the work's interpretation.

Another major subject in the narration, closely related to art, is religion, which is examined in chapter three. What is found is the obscurity, yet limited attainability, of truth, as well as the derivative nature of religion, as emphasized through allusions to Mithraism. Organized faiths are depicted as frequently corrupted and perverting of their mystical origins. And science is seen as the modern surrogate for religion. Finally, reason is attacked as the chief cause of the modern wasteland.

Chapter four investigates the novel's concern with individuals themselves and their interpersonal relationships, in a world of separation, no longer dominated by absolute beliefs, institutions, and values. Again counterfeiting is discovered. In this case, people are revealed as often phony imitations, masking themselves,

in need of union with the universe, but substituting lesser phenomena. The possibility of love as a unifying force with something outside the self is seen as a means to achieve individual meaning. In the end, reality is acknowledged to be composed of a multitude of inseparable dualisms (especially, reason and emotion, good and evil, spirit and matter) which must be put in their proper harmonious balance.

A summary chapter attempts to establish The Recognitions as a contender for the "Great American Novel"--not only because the work successfully dramatizes the American Dream/Nightmare (as a symbol of the Western World's latest evolutionary stage); not only because it profoundly debates art, Christianity, and love; but because it scrutinizes the breadth of existence itself, finding that there are genuine impulses and truths worth copying. Ultimately, despite its surface level description of a world dominated by chaos and nihilism, The Recognitions proves itself a penetrating philosophical analysis, recognizing redemptive possibilities in the cosmos in which man finds himself.

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of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Arts

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CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
1. IN RECOGNITION: AN INTRODUCTION	1
2. PURE GOLD AND YELLOW TIN	13
WYATT'S REDEMPTION THROUGH ART	13
SELF-DEBASEMENT AND ENTROPY IN ART	22
VICTIMIZATION OF THE ARTIST	32
<u>THE RECOGNITIONS</u> COPIES ITSELF	36
WHAT GADDIS IS DOING IN HIS NOVEL	42
3. FROM THE MYSTICAL TO THE RATIONAL	49
EXPLORATIONS AND VOYAGES IN SEARCH OF TRUTH	49
MITHRAISM AND DERIVATIVE RELIGION	57
THE CORRUPTION OF RELIGION	62
SCIENCE AS SURROGATE	70
AGAINST RATIONALISM	73
4. SEPARATENESS, WHAT WENT WRONG	81
MASKING	81
SEPARATION OF PEOPLE	92
SUBSTITUTIONS FOR AT-ONE-MENT	98
LOVE AS A UNIFYING FORCE	106
DUALISTIC NATURE OF REALITY	113
5. THE GOLD FORGED: A SUMMARY	118
BIBLIOGRAPHY	131

Chapter 1

IN RECOGNITION: AN INTRODUCTION

William Gaddis's The Recognitions¹ has been praised by critics as a major event in American literature with statements resembling those of Jack Green: "the best novel written in america"²; "its a great novel, as much the novel of our generation as ulysses was of its"(sic).³ David Burnett

when speaking of contemporary literature said that The Recognitions will outlive 99% of what is on the market today, that it's a masterpiece of characterization and satiric humor, and the richness of its language⁴ is incomparable in contemporary fiction.

Philip Toynbee, in a review of the novel's first

¹William Gaddis, The Recognitions (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1955). All quotations are from this edition and will be cited in the text. NOTE that Gaddis frequently uses ellipses in his novel. To distinguish ellipses from those that reflect excluded text, the latter will be indicated by three asterisks (***).

²Jack Green, "william gaddis the recognitions," newspaper, No. 9 (ca. 1960), p. 1.

³Green, No. 12 (Feb. 24, 1962), p. 1.

⁴Contemporary Authors, eds. James M. Ethridge, Barbara Kopala, and Carolyn Riley, XIX-XX (Detroit: Gale Research, 1968), 120.

paperback edition in 1962, says it is "among the dozen most impressive novels in English which have appeared since the war."⁵ Arthur Sainer in another 1962 review says The Recognitions "is as great a work of art as has been produced by an American writer this century...one of those rare things of our age, a masterpiece, a triumph, a dedication."⁶ Charles Rolo in a 1955 review writes that the book "has the qualities which our intellectual novels have tended to lack: momentum, range, and imaginative vitality."⁷

Unfortunately, note other bravoing critics, The Recognitions has not received the critical attention it deserves. Tony Tanner in his City of Words (1971), one of the best overviews of contemporary American fiction, exclaims about the novel: "The critical neglect of this book is really extraordinary....the book is immensely rich and funny, and it certainly deserves more attention."⁸ Robert Nye in the reference work

⁵Philip Toynbee, "An American Giant," rev. of The Recognitions, Observer Weekend Review, 1 Sept. 1962, pp. 11-12.

⁶Arthur Sainer, rev. of The Recognitions, Voice Books (A Supplement to the Village Voice), 1 Nov. 1962, p. 10.

⁷Charles J. Rolo, rev. of The Recognitions, Atlantic, April, 1955, p. 80.

⁸Tony Tanner, City of Words (New York: Harper, Row, 1971), p. 393.

Contemporary Novelists (1972) notes that The Recognitions has been generally ignored or neglected in literary studies.⁹ Robin Nye proclaims in a 1965 review that the work is one of the two best novels since Joyce's and "I think," he says, "its reputation will grow slowly and that this book will be itself recognized as one of the major events in the American imagination."¹⁰ John W. Aldridge mentions The Recognitions in his book The Devil and the Fire (1972), as well as earlier in his In Search of Heresy (1956), lamenting that it possesses "merits and idiosyncracies remarkable enough to have aroused a storm of critical controversy," but that it has been "allowed to pass from publication into oblivion with nothing in between to arrest [its] passage." This he blames on the lack of sensitive critics of contemporary literature.¹¹ Karl Shapiro in his book To Abolish Children and Other Essays (1968) indicates his assumption that more critical work is needed. He reveals,

⁹Robert Nye, "William Gaddis" in Contemporary Novelists, ed. James Vinson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972), p. 444.

¹⁰Robin Nye, rev. of The Recognitions, Scotsman [Edinburgh] Weekend Magazine, 10 April 1965, p. 3.

¹¹John W. Aldridge, The Devil in the Fire (New York: Harper's Magazine Press, 1972), p. 71.

Some time ago I was in the process of publishing a special issue of the magazine I edited [Prairie Schooner] devoted to Gaddis. There was so much material that I thought of two issues. Writers, critics, and scholars from all over the world were going to contribute to the resurrection of this gigantic, all but unknown American masterpiece of a novel. ...Unfortunately, I lost the editorship of my publication. Or rather I resigned as editor [because of the banning of a story he published]. Gaddis got lost in the shuffle.¹²

David Madden edited a book called Rediscoveries: Informal Essays in Which Well Known Novelists Rediscover Neglected Works of Fiction by One of Their Favorite Authors (1971). His contribution is The Recognitions.¹³ John D. Seelye in another 1962 review states the case simply: "The important thing is that The Recognitions be recognized."¹⁴

The widespread and continuous publication of the novel also suggests its significance: in addition to three paperback editions (Meridan, 1962; Harvest, 1970; and Avon, 1974), the work has been published in Canada (McLeod, 1955), Great Britain (Mac Gibbon and Kee, 1962),

¹²Karl Shapiro, To Abolish Children and Other Essays (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1968), p. 231.

¹³David Madden, "David Madden on William Gaddis's The Recognitions," in Rediscoveries, ed. David Madden (New York: Crown, 1971), pp. 291-304.

¹⁴John D. Seelye, "William Gaddis' Recognitions Unrecognized by Reading Public," rev. of The Recognitions, Berkeley Daily Gazette, 16 March 1962, sec. 2, p. 15.

and France (Gallimard, 1973; Les Reconnaissances, Jean Lambert translator).

Furthermore, Gaddis's winning of the 1976 National Book Award for his second novel JR (1975)¹⁵ was undoubtedly influenced by the greatness of The Recognitions and further reaffirms his worthiness for critical attention.

The following is a summary of what has been published about The Recognitions. The list contains nine major bodies of criticism. The earliest of these remains the principal one--several editions of Jack Green's¹⁶ newspaper,¹⁷ which contain the only criticism of length on Gaddis's novel. This underground periodical was economically mimeographed and distributed, presumably in the Greenwich Village area, in the late fifties and early sixties. Copies of it are, hence, nearly unaccessible. Experimental in style, this publication avoids punctuation and capitalization, and frequents sentence fragments. The issues are devoted predominately to quoting excerpts from the novel, and, more importantly, meticulously summarizing and generally maliciously attacking reviews of The Recognitions for

¹⁵William Gaddis, JR (New York: Knopf, 1975).

¹⁶Peter William Koenig says this is a pseudonym in "Recognizing Gaddis' Recognitions," Contemporary Literature, 16 (Winter 1975), 62.

¹⁷Gaddis is dealt with in issues Nos. 1-2, 4, 8-14 (1957-62).

their ignorance and fraudulence. The attacking, however, is perhaps more important as a scathing exposé of book reviewers than as a look at The Recognitions in depth. Included in one edition of newspaper is a valuable 116-itemed bibliography, mostly of the book's original and early sixties' reviews and a few publicity pieces. The first professionally distributed article is Bernard Benstock's "On William Gaddis: in Recognition of James Joyce," which came out in 1965.¹⁸ This scholarly piece traces Joycean influences in the novel, a questionable linkage.¹⁹

Except for these two pioneering works, the bulk of the criticism on The Recognitions has appeared in the seventies--with increasing frequency. In 1971 The Recognitions saw criticism in chapters of two books: the first of these is Rediscoveries, mentioned above, edited by David Madden and containing his personal contribution, a chapter entitled "On William Gaddis's The Recognitions," which is a basic introduction to Gaddis's novel. The other book is Tony Tanner's City of Words,

¹⁸Bernard Benstock, "On William Gaddis: in Recognition of James Joyce," Contemporary Literature, 6 (Summer 1965), 177-189.

¹⁹See Green, No. 12, p. 25. Also, Grace Eckley, "Exorcising the Demon Forgery, or The Forgery of Pure Gold in Gaddis's Recognitions," in Literature and the Occult, ed. Luanne Frank (Univ. of Texas at Arlington Press, 1976), p. 125.

also mentioned above, which uses The Recognitions to help conclude and summarize his survey of American fiction from 1950-70. Both pieces are good places to begin study of Gaddis's book. Another valuable introduction came out in 1975: "Recognizing Gaddis's Recognition" by Peter William Koenig.²⁰ This article utilizes some of Gaddis's manuscripts to elucidate the novel. The next major article on Gaddis is a chapter in Literature and the Occult (a collection of essays edited in 1976 by Luanne Frank) by Grace Eckley, "Exorcising the Demon Forgery or The Forgery of Pure Gold in Gaddis's Recognitions."²¹ This piece is probably the most insightful scholarly examination of The Recognitions, which among other things discusses the occult as a unifying force in the novel. Two other pieces make 1977 a banner year for Gaddis. The Hollins Critic dedicates its short April edition to him with John Stark's article entitled "William Gaddis: Just Recognition,"²² a hodgepodge of details about The Recognitions and a summary of JR. More recently, the winter 1977 issue of Novel: A Forum on Fiction contains Joseph S. Salemi's "To Soar in

²⁰Koenig, pp. 61-72.

²¹Eckley, pp. 125-136.

²²John Stark, "William Gaddis: Just Recognition," Hollins Critic, 14, No. 2 (1977), 1-12.

Atonement: Art as Expiation in Gaddis's The Recognitions," a good summary discussion of some of the book's ideas on art.²³ Most recently (1978), Susan Strehle Klemtner's "'For a Very Small Audience': The Fiction of William Gaddis" appears in Critique.²⁴ Ostensibly a comparison of The Recognitions and JR, the article is predominately an introduction to JR, and hence inaugurates the criticism on Gaddis's second massive novel.

Beyond these few pieces are many minor sources. The Recognitions was widely reviewed, mostly for the 1955 and 1962 editions. Jack Green's bibliography lists about a hundred reviews in roughly three times that many places.²⁵ The 1962 reviews were considerably more positive than the earlier ones, no doubt due to the underground reputation the novel was receiving. In addition to these reviews are the publicity pieces consisting of a handful of ads and blurbs. Also, there are a few reference works with short entries. The most

²³Joseph S. Salemi, "To Soar in Atonement: Art as Expiation in Gaddis's The Recognitions," Novel: A Forum for Fiction, 10 (Winter 1977), 127-136.

²⁴Susan Strehle Klemtner, "'For a Very Small Audience': The Fiction of William Gaddis," Critique, 19, No. 3 (1978), 61-73.

²⁵Green, No. 14, pp. 70-76.

significant of these is Contemporary Authors, mentioned above. Finally, there are short references in at least several literary articles and books, from mentionings to a couple of pages, which tend to laud Gaddis's novel.²⁶ (Other publications by and about Gaddis include only JR, excerpts from it, reviews of it, and newspaper accounts of his National Book Award.)

All in all, however, this adds up to relatively little thorough explication of The Recognitions.

Concerning the lack of recognition of Gaddis's book, a Time magazine review of JR may have the key to some of the problem: "Part of the truth about the early novel is pathetically simple: with classic mistiming, Gaddis' publishers (Harcourt, Brace) changed management, and the momentum so necessary at a book's coming out was broken."²⁷ Perhaps, though, a more significant reason why the book has received scant criticism is the same reason it has achieved praise: the book's complexity. Sometimes the surface level is so full of intricacies that make for difficult reading, potential critics may be discouraged by Gaddis's novelists' novel. Indeed, the novel is so complicated, just about all the critical

²⁶These many minor sources may be found in the bibliography.

²⁷"Business as Usual," rev. of JR, Time, 13 Oct. 1975, p. 98.

articles on it contain factual errors. Gaddis purposely intended that his 956-page encyclopedic book, equivalent in length to several novels of many contemporary novelists, be unfathomable to all but the careful reader. The Recognitions demands not passive TV-minded skimming, but active creation with the author. Gaddis's comic-tragedy is heavily plotted and carefully unified. There is a multitude of characters, who realistically embody both truthfulness and imperfection within one person. Gaddis experiments with a variety of writing styles which frequently are parodies. There are several languages dispersed throughout and an infinitude of allusions, particularly to literature, religion, art, history, politics, and The Recognitions itself. Overall, Gaddis attempts, by presenting a panorama of the twentieth century juxtaposed with much of the Western Tradition, a broad view of reality which works on several levels. The breadth of the work results in a multiplicity of recognitions for the conscientious reader, whose mind ideally is stimulated by the creation's orchestrated richness and educated by the very functional erudition. Few would find one reading sufficient. Gaddis's masterpiece benefits from rereading and rereading, each of which has its own rewards and may be more enjoyable than the last. It is an anti-novel of sorts that contains not surface level

adventure, but an experience.

This dissertation, then, will present a more in-depth examination of the major theme of The Recognitions than presently exists, in response to the demand and need for more criticism, and in an effort to make the work more permeable to future scholars. The major theme involves search for reality, meaning, and salvation, finite man's highest strivings; it constitutes literal and symbolic voyages of discovery by Wyatt Gwyon and other characters, Gaddis, and the reader, which result in a comprehensive exploration of the contemporary world, particularly as it exists in the United States in all its materialism and despair, amidst the backdrop of Western Civilization. The principal recognition is the counterfeit nature of reality; literal, artistic, religious, and emotional imitation of a dualistic nature; imitation that is good and imitation that is bad, that is ugly and beautiful, unrecognized and recognized, illusory and real, unintended and intended, trivial and profound, debased and redeeming. At the heart of this dramatization of a counterfeit reality pulsates the question, what is the genuine? for it is this that man so easily loses sight of. Gradually, emerges the discovery that there are genuine artistic, religious, and interpersonal impulses worthy of imitation. All in all, The Recognitions proves itself a penetrating philosophical extravaganza that searches for answers to the ultimate

questions. One of its chief answers is that reason, by itself, is not the superior path to understanding and meaning, and in fact reason is attacked as a chief culprit for modern day nihilism and despair. For, the novel suggests, the "male" principle needs to acknowledge the value of its "female" counterpart, since the penetration of reality necessarily involves awareness and acceptance of the inseparable dualisms of which existence is composed. In the end, despite its contemptible and seemingly sacrilegious description of a contemporary wasteland, The Recognitions emerges as a monument to the dignity and hope of mankind. Three areas of reality which are particularly examined in the novel are art, religion, and interpersonal relationships, each of which will be discussed here in its own chapter.

Chapter 2

PURE GOLD AND YELLOW TIN

The principal plot in The Recognitions centers around the world of art. Through art counterfeiting, reality is sought and revealed. On the one hand, deep recognition and redemption of reality is achieved; on the other self-debasement and entropy result. Even when the genuine is discovered, however, copying results in victimization of the artist. One of the chief forgers is Gaddis himself, who alludes to how his Recognitions itself copies in an attempt to be a masterpiece. Gaddis also introduces himself into his novel as a seemingly minor character, thereby providing keys to its interpretation.

WYATT'S REDEMPTION THROUGH ART

The chief character and voyager in the novel is Wyatt Gwyon around whom the principal plot of forgery is centered. Though the complexity of the novel with its subplots and prolific erudite narrative commenting goes profoundly beyond Wyatt's artistic career, an

outline of which is no more a summary of The Recognitions than an outline of Christ's life is a summary of the Bible, Wyatt's artistic voyaging and recognitions can be seen as central to understanding the novel. Though Wyatt is the central character in the novel, however, he is not really the protagonist. Gaddis develops a cast of characters who are variations on Wyatt and his experiences--Otto, Stanley, Reverend Gwyon, Anselm, Sinisterra, and Gaddis himself to name some of the most important examples--and the composite of these characters is the novel's real protagonist. This is one reason Wyatt is nameless throughout most of the novel, thereby de-emphasizing his immediate role. Nonetheless, a glimpse of Wyatt's story may suggest major directions in which the narration goes.

Seeds of Wyatt's intellectual curiosity, particularly for voyaging and historical facts, are seen early in the book. He preoccupies himself with such subjects as Vergil, Gervase of Tilbury (p. 28), alchemy (p. 30), and the voyages of Kubla Khan, Tamerlane, and Prester John (p. 31). Unfortunately, his rigid-minded Great Aunt May, who is grooming him for the ministry, attempts to stifle his inquisitiveness with her Puritanical religion; and once, for example, after Wyatt produces his first drawing, a robin, she chides him for attempting to take the place of God, who is the only creator. This

experience pushes Wyatt, who becomes "terrified with guilty amazement as forms took place under his pencil" (p. 34), into drawing in secret. Eventually, after Aunt May permits him to copy, he produces derivative drawings of Breugel and Bosch, "promoting an artistic imagination" (p. 35).

Within the next few years Aunt May dies and Wyatt becomes seriously ill with a fever. During this illness he reads much, books that his father recommends, particularly of travel, philosophy, and religion. Also, he paints, "with an extraordinary deftness that consumed his whole consciousness" (p. 44). For a period of time, he cannot distinguish reality and spins in delirium unable to separate fact from fantasy, present from past from future. This illness proves a traumatic experience through which Wyatt escapes everyday consciousness, and "for the rest of his life, it never left his eyes" (p. 51). The illness gives Wyatt a non-linear sense of reality which enables him to see through some of the everyday reality others take for granted, as well as a curiosity that inspires him to piece reality together through a search for the genuine. The room in which he lies, for example, had been wallpapered upside-down by his maternal grandfather, the Town Carpenter. In his pre-illness days Wyatt saw "pink dogs' faces with green hats" (p. 52), but now sees that these dogs' faces are

actually upside-down roses. The value of Wyatt's developing artistic awareness is recognized by the Town Carpenter, who admires the paintings Wyatt has done as souvenirs of his illness, particularly for their detail. During this same conversation, the Carpenter also tells Wyatt about the Odyssey, one of the frequent times he tells him about voyages. Wyatt continues painting while convalescing, finishing only derivative paintings and not his original ones.

Partly because of his drive to know the secrets of reality, Wyatt enters Divinity school. He stays only a year, however, deciding to seek life through painting. And so, he goes to Europe, where lack of money leads him to restoring old paintings in Paris. In Germany, he is influenced by Herr Koppel with whom he studies. Koppel tells him,

That romantic disease, originality, all around we see originality of incompetent idiots, they draw nothing, paint nothing, just so the mess they make is original... Even two hundred years ago who wanted to be original, to be original was to admit that you could not do a thing the right way, so you could only do it your own way. When you paint you do not try to be original, only you think about your work, how to make it better, so you copy masters, only masters, for with each copy of a copy the form degenerates...you do not invent shapes, you know them, auswendig wissen Sie, by heart...(p. 89).

Once, after wearing himself out painting, Wyatt finds himself "free, free all of a sudden out in the world.

In the street everything was unfamiliar, everything and everyone I saw was unreal, I felt I was going to lose my balance out there." Then he sees Picasso's "Night Fishing in Antibes" and says,

When I saw it all of a sudden everything was freed into one recognition, really freed into reality that we never see, you never see it. You don't see it in paintings because most of the time you can't see beyond a painting. Most paintings, the instant you see them they become familiar, and then it's too late.***You can't see them any time, just any time, because you can't see freely very often, hardly ever, maybe seven times in a life" (pp. 91-92).

Experiences like these further convince Wyatt of the importance of his chosen profession, about which he somewhat inflatedly remarks, "the artist is the only person who is really given the capability of being happy maybe not all the time, but sometimes" (p. 112). Another time he states that unlike most occupations in which people have "no sense that what they're doing means anything***every work of art is a work of perfect necessity." Furthermore, he religiously proclaims, "a work of art redeems time" (p. 144). The idea that "creation [is] working to be delivered from the vanity of time, about nature working for this great redemption" (p. 148), in fact, leads Wyatt to believe his calling existentially gives his life meaning and value.

Ironically, Wyatt's spiritual calling involves him

in an art forgery ring in New York, headed by the Satanic Recktall Brown. Through the use of mirrors particularly, Wyatt looks into the souls of the paintings of the fifteenth and sixteenth century Flemish masters and re-creates them. He does not merely copy, but, through immersing himself, duplicates the truths he sees. The "recognitions go much deeper" than mere counterfeiting and he figuratively becomes "a master painter in the Guild, in Flanders" (p. 250), working for perfection. Criminality, he says, enters only when he forges the signature. Wyatt's recognitions of truth through painting are echoed in his model Esme's insights through poetry:

It was through this imposed accumulation of chaos that she struggled to move now: beyond it lay simplicity, unmeasureable, residence of perfection, where nothing was created, where originality did not exist: because it was origin: where once she was there work and thought in casual and stumbling sequence did not exist, but only transcription: where the poem she knew but could not write existed, ready-formed, awaiting recovery in that moment when the writing down of it was impossible: because she was the poem (pp. 299-300).

Parallels also are given for an understanding of reality through music, which the composer Stanley has some insights into: he realizes, for example, that the works of Bach, Palestrina, and Gabrieli, which "he admired beyond all else in this life***had touched the origins of design with recognition" (p. 322). And about his

composing, he affirms,

It isn't making it up, inventing music,
it's like...remembering, and like, well
Van Gogh says about poetry, who could
take a drawing of Delacroix as a subject
and improvise with colors, not as himself,
he says but searching for memories of
their pictures, the 'vague consonance of
colors,' the memory that was himself, his
own interpretation (p. 461).

After Wyatt moves beyond the mere imitations of his childhood and becomes more aware of his artistic mastery, he slowly desires to leave the forgery ring and receive credit "from the thing itself" (p. 362). Eventually, he burns the paintings in his studio in an effort to clean up his life. During a party at which Brown accidentally is killed, Wyatt stabs Basil Valentine (his other partner in the forgery ring) in an attempt to leave Valentine's influence and become his own man. Thinking he has murdered Valentine, Wyatt flees to Europe. Here he meets Mr. Sinisterra, disguised as Mr. Yák, who is attempting to make and sell a counterfeit mummy. After being nameless since leaving his New England homelife, Wyatt obtains a stolen Swiss passport and receives a new identity, when he assumes the name Stephan Asche. During this period Wyatt foregoes painting and attempts to re-orient himself through worldly experience.

Ultimately, he becomes a penitent in a Spanish monastery, where his name becomes merely Stephen. Here

he tells Ludy, a phony religious novelist, "I'm lived as a thief.***All my life is lived as a thief" (p. 868). Again, he states that artists come to grips with reality through the masters, from Titian in particular. "That's the way we learn" (p. 870), he says, an idea he repeats several times in his conversation. What he does in the monastery, he reveals to Ludy, is restore paintings. Ludy finds him scraping a painting of St. Dominic, and planning to "restore" an El Greco. Neither painting, Ludy observes, is damaged. Wyatt, saying he has passed the "scientific tests" (p. 872), elaborately describes certain technical aspects of painting. The suggestion seems to be that Wyatt considers himself an equal to artists like Titian, El Greco, and probably the Flemish masters, whose paintings he will re-create. Through the art of these masters he encounters reality, truth, and purpose. He believes he penetrates the illusions and muddlings of life and uncovers the bare essentials, the genuine, which is there all the time. Alluding to the Paradoxa, he says, Cicero "gives Praxiteles no credit for doing anything more than removing the excess marble, until he reaches the real form which was there all the time" (p. 875). Wyatt also declares, "I've been voyaging, until I came here. It's a place to rest, to rest here, to start it all over again, alone" (p. 879). Later he reiterates, "I've been a voyage.***Commuting

between disasters***and now, starting it again" (p. 895). Of life, he philosophizes, one is born into sin, and all that can be done is "living it through," establishing one's own meaning, "to live deliberately" (p. 900).

In essence, the voyages of Wyatt, as well as those of certain characters who are variations on him, exemplify the point that copying copies of reality can result positively in understanding and redeeming it.¹ The aesthetic value of an artifact, it might be said, is dependent on where it fits on a continuum of genuineness--genuineness of intent and genuineness of the result. The artist must seek to represent universal truths, deep insights into man and reality that are true to himself and not merely popular demands, for instance. The artist must feel the original artistic impulses of wonder, dread, and beauty--the artistic gold there is to forge. He must truly feel in his heart what he says ("auswendig wissen Sie," p. 89): it must not be representative of mere idea but of deeply felt experience and insight, which often involves suffering. The artifact must be the work of love--love of man's higher aspirations. Wyatt's mature paintings, as well as Stanley's musical composition, fit this qualification. At least as

¹Cf. Salemi.

important, for great art is that the result of these genuine intentions must be truth. The artwork must represent insights that transcend the artist's immediate time and place. The more an artifact probes the ultimate questions and reveals genuine perception in which all ages may see truth, the higher it may be placed on a continuum of objective truth. This genuineness within and without is recognized from study and imitation of the previous artistic achievement of history, particularly of the masters. "There is no direction to act in now," says Wyatt; artists react, "that's all they can do, and it's...finally there's no room for anyone to do anything but react" (p. 143). Since the great concerns have been dealt with for centuries, the way to high artistic achievement lies in copying, which brings a work closer to "perfection, that perfection only counterfeit can attain" (p. 55).

SELF-DEBASEMENT AND ENTROPY IN ART

The opposite, however, is also portrayed: copying of art is not always so redeeming. More abundant, in fact, in The Recognitions are examples of self-debasing copying. And a narrow line is all that divides these opposites, as Wyatt's experience demonstrates. Once, the corrupted art critic Crémer reminds Wyatt,

"that the artist must approach his work in the same frame of mind in which the criminal commits his deed" (p. 71). Wyatt's involvement, of course, with the art forgery ring is closely connected to his redeeming recognitions. This art ring is a chief example of the corrupting side of art copying. Money, not truth or God is its chief motivation. As Crémer quotes Coulanges, "pictures are bullion" (p. 670). To this Gaddis adds Valentine's truthful statements to Wyatt: "And your precious Van Eyck, do you think he didn't live to his neck in a loud vulgar court? In a world where everything was done for the same reasons everything's done for now? for vanity and avarice and lust" (pp. 689-690). "The devil is the father of false art," (p. 464) says Stanley. This tension between the dualisms of copying for good and copying for bad is so major in the novel, incidentally, that one reference work, The Penguin Companion to American Literature, briefly lists Gaddis by saying little more than that his novel "is based on the palindrome trade ye no mere moneyed art."² One character in the novel, Ed Feasley, notes, "What I get a kick out of is these serious writers who write a book where they say money gives false significance to

²E[ric] M[ottram], "Gaddis, William," in The Penguin Companion to American Literature, eds. Malcolm Bradley, Eric Mottram, and Jean Francis (Great Britain: McGraw Hill, 1971), p. 103.

art, and then they raise hell when their book doesn't make any money" (p. 749). Another time, a critic says to Benny the TV producer, "Do you guys really give this same crap to each other you're giving me, pretending it's a cultural medium? or do you just admit you're all only in it for the money, that you've sold out?" (p. 602).

Despite an encasement of pessimism, which is all many critics have discovered in The Recognitions, Gaddis sneaks in hope and surmountability of evil. There is poetic justice in Brown's death, which may be seen as the result of art forgery. He trips down the stairs in his favorite piece of art, an Italian fifteenth century suit of armour, because the footpieces are fake. And art forgers are discovered because when their imitations of old masters are finished they must damage their work: this is "the most difficult part. Not the actual damaging it, but damaging it without trying to preserve the parts that cost such...well, you know that's where they fail, a good many...painters who do this kind of work, they can't resist saving these parts, and anyone can tell" (p. 242). Another pitfall of counterfeiting artists is noted by Commissioner Clot, who says, "If forgers would content themselves with one forgery, they would get away with it nearly every time" (p. 943). Frequently, their greed results in their failure. A forged van der Goes is touched up by Brown with zinc

white, and consequently discovered as phony because the color was eighteenth century (p. 671). Thus, what was to be the most profitable dealing of Brown's career does not succeed.

Otto serves as another example of profane copying that is eventually frustrated. A parody of Wyatt, he copies habitually. His play The Vanity of Time is strung together with plagiarized ideas. He is obsessed with money: "But money, I mean, damn it, a man does feel castrated in New York without money" (pp. 150-151). He reads the Libro dell'Arte which says to use real gold leaf not "tin glazed with yellow" (p. 146), but his art is not genuine; it does not originate from the heart, from genuine artistic impulses. He constantly repeats Wyatt's ideas on art, and thus frequently speaks truthfully. But because he is a phony, his pretensions backfire; he is exposed and accused of plagiarizing, about which numerous members of his circle gossip. Needless to say, he feels degraded: "It's just...all this...damned...Otto hunched again, looking down before him.--And when people say I stole it, that I plagiarized" (p. 463). Although Otto's art fails because it does not stem from genuine artistic impulses, some of what it says may still be truthful; low placement, then, on only one of the scales of genuineness is all that is needed for negative artistic results.

Although counterfeiting frequently fails at its own game, it nonetheless is widespread in the world of The Recognitions. Mr. Sinisterra, a major character, who has recently served a lengthy sentence for his crime of counterfeiting and whom Gaddis refers to as a "sensitive artist" (p. 5), boasts that his profession "is one of the only crafts left" (p. 490), "It's not a place for bums to get into, it's a place for artists, for craftsmen" (p. 493). To avoid being caught again, he flees to Europe and becomes involved in his scheme to sell the faked mummy he makes "with such ingenuity, it was really a masterpiece" (p. 919). Appropriately, though, by the novel's end, Sinisterra's money is recognized as counterfeit and he is presumably murdered (in place of the real Mr. Yák) because of his counterfeit mummy scheme. Another counterfeiter, "a man apprehended on a charge of engraving ten dollar bills said it had grown out of etching nature studies, he had 'just drifted into counterfeiting from a hobby of fooling around with engraving copper plates'" (p. 742). Three other men are arrested for counterfeiting substitute money: "Los Angeles police confiscated a hydraulic press, dies, and the plastic rubber compound with which the then arrested men were counterfeiting poker chips, to be cashed in the gambling palaces across the line in Las Vegas" (p. 946). Max makes his living as a ghost

painter; "He paints pictures for a well-known painter who signs them and sells them for originals" (p. 944). Another time it is revealed that Max plagiarizes a poem. Although this poem (by Rilke) contains truth, the level of genuineness of intent brings it to an appropriate fate: Max is exposed. In another situation, Max says "What's the difference?" (p. 964) about the existence of authorized editions of Sherlock Holmes, written since the death of their creator, Doyle. Eddie Zefnic, who is Mr. Pivner's make-believe son, reads an advertisement: "The Ghost Artists***We Paint It You Sign It Why Not Give an Exhibition?" (p. 741). A young man candidly admits "I've really practically finished the novel, all I have to do now is put in the motivation.***I've been reading Dante trying to get some ideas" (p. 910). Indeed, suggests Valentine, the history of the Western World serves as a record of art forgery, the only period of exception being the Middle Ages when "all that talent went into holy relics" (p. 245). However, with poetic justice, whenever non-genuine copying exists in The Recognitions, it seems to be exposed. Perhaps, then, one key in The Recognitions to whether art is genuine or fake is its ultimate fate.

Another kind of cheapening artistic copying abounds in The Recognitions, that which stems from the demands of the popular culture, resulting in

superficiality and ultimately entropy of genuine artistic awareness. Wyatt sees some of this in Paris:

the plethora of daubs turned out on Montmartre for tourists, those arbiters of illustration to whom painting was a personalized representation of scenes and creatures they held dear; might not know art but they knew what they liked, hand-painted pictures (originals) for which they paid in the only currency they understood, to painters whose visions had shrunk to the same proportions. He might walk up there occasionally and see them, the alleys infested with them painting the same pictures from different angles, the same painting varying from easel to easel as different versions of a misunderstood truth, but the progeny of each single easel identical reproduction, following precept of Henner who called this the only way of being original. Passing, he showed all the interest for them he might have for men whitewashing walls. (pp. 67-68)

He also notes cheapening artistic copying stemming from the demands of popular culture in those works of art produced by the printing press: "that damned 'Mona Lisa,' no one sees it, you can't see it with a thousand off-center reproductions between you and it". (p. 52). In other instances, Max exclaims that the popular song "'Yes We have No Bananas' was lifted right out of Handel's Messiah" (p. 461). Mr. Pivner, the empty-hearted businessman of Gaddis's wasteland, becomes interested by an advertisement headed, "If you can count, you can paint.***New Subjects for your Paint-It-Yourself Collection" (p. 563). A "sort of bob version" (p. 661) of Faust is being made for TV. One TV man

candidly admits, "This is the whoring of the arts, and we're the pimps, see?" (p. 736). And in an example of how Gaddis's serious viewpoint is far from humorless, one man "had a crude plastic reproduction of the Venus de Milo. The sign in the place where he had bought it said, 'Because of the amusing way in which these shakers pour hide them when Grandma's around'" (p. 735). Symbolic of mass-produced and superficial "gold" is a handful of one peseta notes of which Sinisterra remarks, "that's what depresses me about a poor country***--all the small denominations, it gets so dirty you can't hardly recognize it" (p. 782). Valentine sums up his and the book's general view of this degenerative diminishing of genuine artistic perception when he says, "No reproduction is nice" (p. 233).

Popular writing is frequently attacked in The Recognitions, how in catering to the masses it becomes artless. Gaddis mentions "colyumists [sic] with the 'common touch,' who stimulated and encouraged the average reader's lack of intelligence, talents, and sensitivity" (p. 289). Valentine tells Wyatt one of Brown's ideas:

the idea of a novel factory, a sort of assembly line of writers, each one with his own especial little job. Mass production, he said, and tailored to the public taste.***but it's not so funny in his hands, you know. Just recently he started this business of submitting novels to a

public opinion board, a cross-section of readers who give their opinions, and the author makes changes accordingly. Best sellers, of course (p. 243).

Wyatt says of most writers today,

They write for people who read with the surface of their minds, people with habits that make the smallest demands on them, people brought up reading for facts, who know what's going to come next and want to know what's coming next, and get angry at surprises. Clarity's essential (p. 113).

Gaddis says a newspaper story about a Spanish girl who is about to be canonized exists not because "the little girl was soon to become a saint, but because she had been raped and murdered" (p. 291). The gruff macho Jesse tells Otto to scrap his play and write what amounts to a surface level story of sex and adventure, about which he says, "This is what people like to read about, realism, real men doing something, not a lot of crap in fancy trimmings" (p. 157). Ludy, "a distinguished novelist" (p. 859), stands as the symbol for one kind of popular writer. He goes to the monastery in San Zwingli for "an experience of a religious nature" (p. 869), for material for a book he is writing. But the closest he gets to a spiritual experience is stealing ideas that he does not completely understand. Of his work, Gaddis writes,

As his writings showed, he found his duty to his fellow man in proselytizing for those virtues which bound his fellow

man's better selves together, favoring none over another among the systems of worship he saw round him, honoring all, advancing in the name of some amorphous; and highly reasonable Good, in the true eclectic tradition of his country, a confederate of virtue wherever he found it, and a go-between for the postures it assumed, explaining not man to himself, but men to each other.

All of which meant that he reached his fellow man in large numbers, as his serene face (on the dust jacket), and his royalties showed. (pp. 860-861)

It is because of the entropic nature of popular arts that Wyatt believes criticism is the art we need most today. But this is not to say that modern times, which Gaddis emphasizes, are alone in this need. Valentine reminds Wyatt about other times, about "the trash that's disappeared? Just because we have a few masterpieces left, do you think they were all masterpieces? What about the pictures we've never seen, and never will see? that were as bad as anything that's ever been done" (p. 689).

In opposition, then, to redeeming art, self-debasing art in The Recognitions proves itself to be low on at least one of the two continuums of genuineness. It is exposed with poetic justice and placed low on the continuums if it is done primarily for money and greed and not love of higher values, if it is done as a pose, if it is done without heartfelt insights, if it is mass-produced on a superficial scale for popular

consumption, if it encourages lack of audience stimulation, or otherwise lacks genuineness within or without. Furthermore, the two scales of genuineness are not mutually exclusive. An artist must respond to genuine artistic impulses if his work is to contain the unity and depth which is possible only if the work has been sifted through the entire self.

VICTIMIZATION OF THE ARTIST

Regardless of whether the art produced is profound or profane, a subtheme of The Recognitions emphasizes that the producer is finite, and therefore becomes a victim of his art. This sad fact Wyatt, Gaddis, and others recognize in their search for reality. Sacrifice and denial they find are essential to a meaningful existence. In fact, perhaps the higher one's goals, the more intensely one surrenders himself for these precious moments of exaltation. Early in Wyatt's career, he tells Esther, "What is it they want from a man that they didn't get from his work?***What's any artist but the dregs of his work? the human shambles that follows it around. What's left of the man when the work's done but a shamble of apology" (pp. 95-96). Later on, Wyatt puts it another way, that being dedicated to one's art is "like saying a man's true to his cancer" (p. 244).

Valentine, who thinks much like Wyatt (except in Part III) and from whom Wyatt probably learns a lot, reminds him of his fate: "An artist does not exist, except as a vehicle for his work. If you live simply in a world of shapes and smells? You're bound to become just that." To this Wyatt whispers, "Yes, I don't live, I'm...I am lived" (p. 263).

Similar repetitions occur periodically, presumably echoing Gaddis's experience while dedicating himself to his novel. Once, Valentine says his profession (critic, among other things) is "a pitifully selfish career! being lived" (p. 335). Esther repeats back to Wyatt his idea that "all of our highest goals are inhuman ones" (p. 589). Wyatt's reoccurring dream that his hair is on fire is symbolic of his self-consumption for art, as is his bleeding from shaving. Once when Esther offers to buy him an electric razor, he refuses, saying she does not understand the precision of suffering. She thinks his life "isn't human...It isn't a way to live" (p. 126), as she tells Otto after seeing her husband listening intensely to Bach unaware of anything else. Brown also questions this behavior by Wyatt and complains to Valentine, "What the hell, when you're doing work like he is, you can lose contact with things, finally you don't have a real sense of reality" (p. 235). By this, of course, he means money and material

possessions which Wyatt sacrifices for a higher sense of reality.

Some of Wyatt's dedication, however, seems to be undermined by Gaddis's depiction of his childhood. After all, he is pressured partially by Aunt May to become a priest, a profession closely aligned to that of the artist, except that the priest's purpose is to protect mysteries, the artist's to expose them. Also, a significant part of Wyatt's childhood is involved with studying suffering and martyrdom. Wyatt finds his social conditioning difficult to avoid. His lack of a name throughout the bulk of the novel is undoubtedly related to his lack of personal identity. Eventually, however, he perceives his conditioning and escapes some of it. At this point, his name becomes Stephen, reminiscent of St. Stephen, the first martyr. His identity becomes clearer and he is less a purposeless victim because he understands his goals more thoroughly. The parallels between Wyatt's life and St. Stephen's are emphasized with many Christ allusions. (Christ is, obviously, the original from which martyrs are copied.) Much action during Wyatt's immersion into his own person takes place during the Christmas season. By the time he is thirty-three years old, Easter season is on. In one humorous scene, Wyatt literally eats his father accidentally because his father's cremated ashes are

mistaken for some kind of bread ingredient. This state of affairs serves as an example of the richness of Gaddis's novel; on the one hand, the novel is profoundly serious, on the other jokeful. Perhaps, though, Wyatt's obvious influences by others do not so much undermine his intentions as emphasize the inter-relatedness of people and everything that is.

Esme is another creator whose artistic experience is like Wyatt's. Once when she is writing poetry she locks herself from the world with the sign, "Do Not Disturb Me I am Working" (p. 289). Stanley's experience, however, copies Wyatt's more. His goal is to play in the cathedral in Fenestrula, Italy, "a lonely ambition, solitary epiphany" (p. 319). He finds his music requires deep solitary concentration, "which he worked on when he could, building the tomb he knew it to be, as every piece of created work is the tomb of its creator" (p. 303). At one point, he struggles over whether to marry the pregnant Esme or to dedicate himself to his music; he chooses music (p. 927). When he finally plays his masterpiece in Fenestrula at the novel's very end, the cathedral collapses from the music's vibrations and Stanley's art literally and symbolically entombs him.

THE RECOGNITIONS COPIES ITSELF

Among all the artists and their experiences in The Recognitions, Gaddis includes himself. He too obviously feels himself sacrificed for his vocation and indirectly he refers to The Recognitions and how it works. Similar to the way Wyatt achieves redemption through copying the masters, Gaddis attempts his redemption through copying. The Recognitions, of course, is Gaddis's attempt at making his life worthwhile, his salvation, and so the product of his search for meaning. Knowing what he says about The Recognitions in The Recognitions not only helps the reader to understand the novel's major theme, but, on a more literal level, the novel itself.

On one level The Recognitions is a literary derivative. Among other things, it is a parody of Goethe's Faust ("We're shooting Faust now, a sort of bob version, we've changed him to this refugee artist," notes a TV man [p. 616]). Faust, Valentine says, is itself derivative of the fourth century Clementine Recognitions (authorship unknown). This, it turns out, is based on "The Circuits of Peter, known to Origen (c. 240), which itself has an archetype in the Preachings of Peter (c. 200)."³ Also the Clementine Homilies tell the same

³Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, ed. James Hastings, XI (New York: Scribner, 1921), 522.

basic story as The Recognitions, though "it is not easy to say which form is the original."⁴ Still another version is the Epitome, which is "manifestly a late form."⁵ (All this is reminiscent of the Bosch tabletop and its imitations in Gaddis's novel.) The Clementine Recognitions is frequently referred to as the first Christian novel; Gaddis's work, then, is an up-dated account of the Christian world. The Recognitions is also a copy of life, not only in the general sense, but in the particular: Wyatt most certainly is based on a factual historical figure--Hans Van Meegeren (1889-1947), who "laboriously painted and most carefully aged...14 Dutch 17th-century 'masterpieces.'" Eventually, he confessed to forgery, but was not believed until he created another painting and "produced bits of the rare pigments he had used in his forgeries. Van Meegeren had been paid the astounding sum of over \$3 million in Dutch gulden for his paintings, and six of his Vermeers hung in museums and galleries."⁶

In addition to this literal copying, The

⁴A Dictionary of Christian Biography and Literature to the End of the Sixth Century A.D., eds. Henry Wace and William C. Piercy (Boston: Little, Brown, 1911), p. 185.

⁵Dictionary of Christian Biography, p. 183.

⁶David Wallechinsky, Irving Wallace, and Amy Wallace, The Book of Lists (New York: Bantam, 1977), p. 47.

Recognitions copies through innumerable allusions; especially to music, painting, and literature. It builds on the Western artistic heritage. "What hasn't been written before?" (p. 350), says Max. In art "there's no direction to act in now." (p. 143), says Wyatt. And so, The Recognitions attempts to bring much of the tradition together, to bring what has been done closer to perfection. Stanley says once about contemporary artists that "some of them are so excited about discovering new mediums and new forms***that they never have time to work in one that's already established" (p. 186). Gaddis's novel works with the established form and content, but so elaborately it pushes the limits of the novel. In building on the established form, it results in something new. Partly because of the book's richness of allusions and forgeries of others' ideas, reading it is an experience that encourages the reader to create along with the author, to recognize truths. What the "colored girl in a plaid skirt" pretentiously says of Proust also applies to The Recognitions: "Reading Proust isn't just reading a book, it's an experience" (453). Unlike "most writing now," Gaddis's is more realistic in its copying of life in that it is not like "newspaper accounts," (p. 113) but contains a multitude of experiences for the reader who never can put the book together quite the same way.

Wyatt's unfinished painting of his mother symbolizes this technique. His father, Gwyon, was awed by this painting: "each time he returned to it, it was slightly different than he remembered, intractably thwarting the completion he had managed" (p. 57). A careful reading of The Recognitions encourages this same experience; facts take on new meaning, and recognitions, passed over previously, are made. In order to stimulate recognitions, Gaddis makes his novel demanding reading. For this reason characters, for example, are not always directly referred to. This is still another reason Wyatt is without a name throughout much of the novel. He and others must be truly recognized without labels.

The result of all this copying of the masters in The Recognitions is a masterpiece that never can be truly finished by either the reader or Gaddis; it is by its very nature imperfect and unfinished despite its length. Through its complexity and depth the novel strives to be meaningful, not only for today but for every period. The work attempts to escape its verbal limitations. The several languages used, for example, can be seen as helping the work escape the English-speaking culture and encompass the whole of the Western Tradition, thus enriching the reader's experience in much the same way as does a literary allusion.

The majority of The Recognitions' indirect allusions to itself are found in the work's descriptions of the fifteenth and sixteenth century Flemish masters, whom Gaddis imitates. Throughout the book Flemish artists, particularly Jan and Hubert Van Eyck, Bosch, Breughel, van de Weyen, and Bouts, are mentioned. Once Otto discusses these painters (in paraphrase of Wyatt's ideas) and consequently The Recognitions:

The separate multiple consciousness of the...things in these Flemish primitives, that is really the force and the flaw in these paintings.***You might say that the thoroughness with which they feel obliged to recreate the atmosphere, and the... these painters who aren't long on suggestion, but pile up perfection layer on layer, and the detail, it's...it becomes both the force and the flaw.***Like a writer who can't help devoting as much care to a moment as to an hour.***The perfection (p. 460).

Wyatt especially is preoccupied with the Flemish masters he copies, whose compositions are "made up of separateness" (p. 807); what Gaddis calls "progressive revelation, that doctrine which finds man incapable of receiving Truth all of a lump, but offers it to him only in a series of distorted fragments" (p. 132), in the tradition of T. S. Eliot's Wasteland. Stanley adds to this description of The Recognitions when he says,

This self-sufficiency of fragments, that's where the curse is, fragments that don't belong to anything. Separately they don't mean anything, but it's almost impossible to pull them all together into a whole.

And now it's impossible to accomplish a body of work without a continuous sense of time, so instead you try to get all the parts together into one work that will stand by itself and serve the same thing a lifetime of separate works does, something higher than itself. (p. 616)

The Recognitions particularly resembles the works of Bosch, not only in its descriptions of the Seven Deadly Sins and damnation, but because it is both deeply religious and sacrilegious.

There is a multiple perspective in the work of the Flemish masters: "the Flemish painter took twenty perspectives if he wished" (p. 251). Similarly, Gaddis creates his cast of characters who are variations on Wyatt and his experiences: "No one of them moves, but it reflects him, none of them reacts, but to react with him, none of them hate but to hate with him, to hate him, and loving...none of them loves, but..." (p. 263). Furthermore, these multiple perspectives are done by a "writer who can't help devoting as much care to a moment as to an hour" (p. 124). Maximum detail is strived for, layer and layer of detail, anything and everything is recognized by the writer: "In an alley," for example, "a dog hunting in a garbage can displayed infinite grace with the unconscious hang of his right foreleg" (p. 73). Other resemblances to the Flemish masters are also found in the book's sometimes painstaking realism, its richness of texture, its powerful

little character portraits, its surrealism, allegory, religious emotion, exaggeration, humor, satire, and breadth of vision and interests. In imitation of the Flemish and other masters, The Recognitions achieves greatness by copying.

WHAT GADDIS IS DOING IN HIS NOVEL

In addition to The Recognitions' allusions to itself, Gaddis appears in his book as the seemingly very minor character, the novelist Willie. Through Willie, Gaddis cleverly sneaks in keys to the major concerns of the novel. These concerns explained throughout this dissertation will be touched on here. Gaddis also includes self-parody, that seems to suggest his awareness that he is a man and his work is less than perfect, merely a deeply-felt dramatization of his perceptions.

The first time the reader hears of Willie is indirectly through a phone conversation (in which Willie is referred to by name only once) between Valentine and Willie's friend, Father Martin. The conversation is brief, but significant. It begins (for the reader) with Valentine mysteriously tossing out comments about "the holy sacrament turned inside out," "the redemption of women," "Eve, the curse humanity had put on her," and "the Mass performed on the loins" (p. 372). Although

it is too early in the novel to attach meaning to these hints, they later become important pieces to the puzzle of The Recognitions. On one level, they pertain to the novel's attack on reason (the "male" principle) and the novel's acknowledgment of the non-rational, the absurd, the occult, or whatever this "female" principle may be labeled. On another level, these comments suggest The Recognitions' summary of a dualistic reality that cannot be separated, mind from matter for example.

The conversation continues:

but what in heaven's name do you want to know this sort of thing for? A novel? But...yes, perhaps he can; if he thinks it will do any good. But you can tell your friend Willie that salvation is hardly the practical study it was then. What?... Why, simply because in the Middle Ages they were convinced that they had souls to save. (pp. 372-373).

At this point it is obvious the caller is only asking questions for Willie, who is writing a novel on salvation. The reader then hears of the sources of Gaddis's novel: the Clementine Recognitions and Faust:

The what? The Recognitions? no, it's Clement of Rome. Mostly talk, talk, talk. The young man's concern is for the immortality of his soul, he goes to Egypt to find the magicians and learn their secrets. It's been referred to as the first Christian novel. What? Yes, it's really the beginning of the whole faust legend. But one can hardly...eh? My, your friend is writing for a rather small audience, isn't he (pp. 372-373).

In these lines, then, Gaddis's novel is revealed as a

spiritual quest. Finally, the last words of the phone call the reader hears are, "Do they have what in the Vatican? A mold for figleaves?" (p. 373) which may indicate the church's tendency to separate the dichotomy of soul and body, to the detriment of the body.

Later in the novel Willie appears--the first time briefly and the second, and last, time only as a passer-by. In the first appearance, he is one of several characters in a relatively short conversation at a Greenwich Village bar. Again, he is referred to by name only once, and then not until the discussion is ending. Once more, however, easily passed-over lines are important keys to The Recognitions. First Willie says to Otto, "misogyny recapitulates phylogyny." This is not only a pun but a comment that women are hated because they are loved. Man in the novel is afraid to belong to God or another person because this is felt to be a weakness. On another level, if women are seen embodying the non-rational forces in man, there is the suggestion that man is afraid of himself and unwilling to accept the little understood irrational forces in him. On a third level, the statement represents the union of opposites, with which Gaddis is concerned, with his contention that a factor cannot exist without its opposite partner.

In response to Otto's asking the name of the book

he is writing, Willie says, "Baedeker's Babel" (p. 475). This is a reference to The Recognitions being sort of a guide book to man's attempt to grasp powers beyond him, his attempt to explain reality through reason. It also alludes to The Recognitions being a guide to the noise and confusion of modern times and to the numerous languages in which it is written. Next Otto says, "And you say you've become a misologist?" (p. 475)--someone who distrusts reason. As the novel subtly reveals, this term applied to Gaddis is highly valid. The conversation proceeds with Esme's attempted suicide as the dominant topic. Willie says the last time he saw her "she had to have somebody around her all the time, so she would ask if she'd really done something or gone somewhere. She looked like she was going to flip then" (p. 477). Esme in the novel is having a difficult time surviving. Since she is a symbol for the non-rational forces in man, Willie's comment that she is barely alive is significant. Willie also notes that Esme "can even see the stars in the daytime" (pp. 477-478). Esme's intuition, then, is shown to be capable of perceiving truth that the light of reason obscures. Willie's next statement refers to Charles's mother's being a "Christian Science" (p. 478). Although this is not elaborated on, that Willie sees interest in Christian Science, a modern rationalistic interpretation of

Christianity, depicts further Gaddis's concerns. The scene nears its end with Willie declaring he is writing a novel concerned with the "Eschatological, the doctrine of last things" (p. 478).

The other time Willie appears is very brief. He walks by "carrying two books, one titled, The Destruction of the Philosophers, the other, The Destruction of the Destruction,***muttering,--Christ. Christ, Christ, Christ, Christ, Christ" (p. 734). These two books are not "humorous inventions," but real, "the first is by algazel, an arab moslem cll00 ad it attempts to refute doctrines of philosophers (aristotle & avicenna) opposed to koran the 2nd is by averroes, to refute the 1st."⁷ These two books represent a primary concern of Gaddis in his novel--the debate over whether God is reached through reason and philosophical speculation or through faith and mystical experience. The repetitions of Christ's name express Willie's weariness, but more importantly denote Gaddis's search for the essence--the genuine--of Christianity, which Reverend Gwyon especially pursues.

Gaddis indicates his theme deals with profound matters, but he also attests somewhat to his human limitations. Perhaps, in an effort to undermine attacks

⁷Green, No. 12 (Feb. 24, 1962), p. 44.

of pretentiousness, Gaddis not only makes it clear that a work of art cannot reach perfection, but parodies himself through the character of Willie. After Valentine's phone conversation, Valentine mutters, "What can drive anyone to write novels" (p. 373), perhaps saying that Gaddis is pursuing a questionable profession. When Willie first appears the "yellowness of his skin" (p. 475) is mentioned, perhaps suggesting that Gaddis has been overly intellectual and ignorant of bodily concerns. Similarly, Gaddis refers to Willie's "haggardly alert face" (p. 476). A more obvious parody, however, lies in the referring to Willie four times as "the haggard boy" (pp. 476, 477, and 478). One character wonders whether Willie is "drunk" or somewhat foolishly "writing for a very small audience" (p. 478) in echo of Valentine's comments. The second time Willie appears, he is described as "a young man with a thin face, a slightly crooked nose, and a weary expression which embraced his whole appearance" (p. 734). The emphasis on Willie's weariness, Gaddis's theme of the artist as victim, and Wyatt's final discovery of the need for love and close interpersonal relationships may all unite here in an effort to proclaim Gaddis's own confession of life-denial.

Immediately following the last-mentioned description of Willie, one character reveals that Willie is

one of the "writers" (p. 734) for The Lives of the Saints TV series. Although the reference is not clear, perhaps Gaddis is saying that his attempt at writing about the search for salvation and the possibility of sainthood is, like the TV series, but a perverted and watered-down version of the actual experiences of St. Francis of Assisi, for instance. Noteworthy here is that Gaddis has employed himself as a scriptwriter. A final bit of self-parody occurs when a trouserless phony reviewer of The Recognitions is discussing how all he needs for the review is the book jacket, at which point Gaddis notes that "for some crotchety reason there was no picture of the author" (p. 936) on it (*italics inserted*). The other man explains that he is counting the letters in the "damned thing" because he has been having trouble sleeping (p. 937).

Chapter 3

FROM THE MYSTICAL TO THE RATIONAL

The Recognitions' theme of search for reality and the discovery of its counterfeit nature is further exemplified through religion. The novel contains explorations for the essence of existence and the genuine religious experience. What primarily is found, however, is philosophical obscurity and derivative religion that has perverted the genuine religious impulses. Science is observed as the modern surrogate for religion. Finally, reason is attacked as the chief cause of the modern wasteland.

EXPLORATIONS AND VOYAGES IN SEARCH OF TRUTH

While much of the literal plot of The Recognitions centers around art, religion plays nearly as important a role in the novel. The anticipated canonization of a young Spanish girl and consequent pilgrimage to the seat of the Western world, Rome, are unifying elements which help move the plot towards completion. Wyatt of course goes to the Spanish monastery for a spiritual retreat.

He and numerous other characters have priestly backgrounds or similar religious associations. Wyatt studies for the ministry. Gwyon is the last of a line of religious ministers. Valentine once studied for the priesthood, and in fact is probably a priest in disguise. Anselm is a drunk who "gets all screwed up with religion" (p. 182). Agnes Deigh is a critic with strong Roman Catholic interests. Stanley is a devout Catholic. In addition, the novel is filled with fascinating details of religion, much talk of God, and many references to Christianity, Buddhism, Mohammedism, Judaism, and so-called pagan and primitive religions. Allusions to alchemy are found throughout, suggesting the alchemistic inspirations of Wyatt who is preoccupied with finding an egg of a griffin, the fabled beast of the Middle Ages. Wyatt, of course, seeks not metallic gold but the symbolic gold of priceless art; more importantly, however, alchemy is not merely the attempt to forge gold but a search for the basic structure of matter, the riddle of life, and this is Wyatt's deeper goal. Otto suggests this when he repeats Wyatt's comment: "I mean today we were talking about alchemy, and the mysteries that, about the redemption of matter...Matter, he said matter was a luxury, was our luxury, and that matter, I mean redemption" (p. 129).

Religion in The Recognitions, in fact, is depicted

as the original source from which art stems. The history of art reveals its gradual secularization.

Stanley notes once: "You know, Agnes, this concerto I'm working on, if I'd lived three hundred years ago why...then it would be a Mass. A Requiem Mass" (p. 600). Another time he compares the classical masters with their less distinguished counterparts of today. They had created masterpieces,

And how? with music written for the Church. Not written with obsessions of copyright foremost; not written to be played by men in worn dinner jackets, sung by girls in sequins, involved in wage disputes and radio rights, recording rights, union rights; not written to be issued through a skull-sized plastic box plugged into the wall as background for seductions and the funnypapers, for arguments over automobiles, personalities, skirt sizes, cocktails, the flub-a-dub of a lonely girl washing her girdle; not written to be punctuated by recommendations for headache remedies, stomach appeasers, detergents, hair oil (p. 322).

Religion and art history are shown as closely related in Gaddis's novel. Both are man's attempt at approaching, understanding, respecting, and praising reality. The priest and the artist are two of a kind, except that "the priest is the guardian of mysteries. The artist is driven to expose them" (p. 261). This is a major reason Wyatt is associated with Christ and suffering. Art is a form of religion. But, "When art tries to be a religion in itself, Stanley persisted,--a religion of perfect form and beauty, but then there it is all alone,

not uniting people, not...like the Church does but, look at the gulf between people and modern art." (p. 632).

Whether the search for truth be through religion or art, the ends are the same and The Recognitions accepts the redemptive powers of each. Seeking God or truth is what makes life worthwhile. Finite beings, Gaddis might add, need something higher than themselves. Says Stanley, humans need love, "But not finite love that's as weak as we are.***I mean love has to be something greater than ourselves, and when it is it's faith" (p. 529). Man, as a group, needs understanding of his existence on earth. As Stanley quotes Voltaire, "If there were no God, it would be necessary to invent him." "Nothing is self-sufficient" (p. 617), continues Stanley. This fear of not knowing God or that none exists and the need to pursue the truth is suggested in Ludy's fear in a darkened room of the San Zwingli monastery; he had "the stifling sense, which increased every instant, that the doorway was not open, that there might be no doorway at all; and inching in fear of confirming such a possibility, his hand moved as slowly as he could let it, toward the door frame" (p. 875).

Although search for truth is man's highest and most worthwhile goal, The Recognitions reveals that truth is perplexingly complex and ultimately unattainable.

Life intricately interweaves truth, with copies, with fiction, with perversions, in layers that confuse the genuine and the real with the fake and the illusory. One perception of reality is frequently superimposed on another. Stanley writes on "palimpsests" (p. 827). His "work was done on scrap paper which he ruled himself and on envelope backs, old letters, or old scores which he erased" (p. 323). Valentine tells of a badly forged van der Goes: "crude job of over painting on a glue finish, which would wash right off.***But there was the genuine, duty-free, original work of art underneath" (p. 244). Otto tells a more incredible story about a "forged Titian that somebody had painted over another old painting, when they scraped the forged Titian away they found some worthless old painting underneath it***and underneath that they found a Titian, a real Titian that had been there all the time" (pp. 450-451). At least in this case Otto speaks of, the original exists. Other cases are more complicated. In early America

a third of the paper money in circulation was counterfeit, and another third the issue of what were generously termed "irresponsible" banks. Meanwhile inspectors went from one bank to another, following the security bullion which was obligingly moved moved from the bank they had just inspected to the one where they arrived next; and the importunate public demanding the same assurance, was satisfied with boxes rattling broken glass (p. 495).

The question of whether what is often seen is the genuine or the fake and whether there is even the "gold to forge" (p. 689) is one that concerns Wyatt throughout his career. In fact, the question of the authenticity of a tabletop depicting the "Seven Deadly Sins" by Bosch is a unifying symbol in The Recognitions. The Italian Conte di Brescia had had this tabletop copied so that he could sell the original and display the copy. Gwyon buys the original, "though some fainaiguing had been necessary at Italian customs, confirming it a fake to get it out of the country" (p. 25). Then, Wyatt as a "boy copied it and stole the original and left his copy in its place, and sold the original" (246). Eventually, Brown buys the original and displays it in a room where Wyatt sees it. Finally, Valentine steals the original and substitutes a copy. This copy Wyatt sees and becomes upset over: "Copying a copy? is that where I started? All my life I've sworn it was real year after year" (p. 381). After much self doubt, Valentine reveals to him that he had switched tabletops, where upon Wyatt obviously is relieved: "Thank God there was the gold to forge!" (p. 689).

Needless to say, however, all this becomes very confusing, revealing there is objective truth, though it is elusive and the ability to detect it a highly precious commodity. Also revealed is that truth is

never known entirely and most of it remains mysterious. The idea noted by Wyatt that Cicero "gives Praxiteles no credit for doing anything more than removing the excess marble, until he reaches the real form which was there all the time" (p. 875) hints that since the marble can be sculptured in an infinite number of ways, truth is infinite and only an infinitesimal amount of it can be known. If truth were represented by one block of marble and it could be repeatedly sculptured and returned to block form, an infinite number of re-sculpturings, or discoveries of the real forms inside, will always remain when the sculptor is finite man. On another level, Wyatt's concern, whether there is the gold to forge, relates to the possibility of values outside of the individual, though not necessarily absolutes. The concern, then, is a philosophical one relating to the distinctions between the real and the illusory. The novel seems to be saying gold does exist, that there can be valid universal values and impulses that man can grasp onto as a group. Twentieth century relativity and Kantian philosophy has not destroyed this possibility.

The significance of the description of Praxiteles' marble is similar to that of the sea as Gaddis describes it, in reminiscence of Moby Dick. Ultimately, like life, the sea is a mystery, an unsoluble riddle, subject

to a multiplicity of interpretations, all unprovable; a mass seemingly different to the eyes of the beholder, man:

The sea, romantic in books, or dreams or conversation, symbol in poetry, the mother, last lover, and here it was, none of those things before him [Stanley]. Romantic? this heaving, senseless actuality? alive? evil? symbolical? shifting its surfaces in imitation of life over depths the whole fabric of darkness, of blind life and death. Boundlessly neither yes or no, good nor evil, hope nor fear, pretending to all these things in the eyes that first beheld it, but unchanged since then, still its own color, heaving with the indifferent hunger of all actuality (p. 845).

The sea description, then, seems to be a significant part of the answer to Wyatt's searchings for reality--his searchings in the celestial sea described by the Gervase of Tilbury tale that preoccupies him--a tale which suggests the possibility of contacting beings in the heavens, supernatural, who will provide keys to understanding eternal truths:

Gervase of Tilbury [in his Otia Imperialia, composed ca. 1211 A.D.] relates, that as the people were coming out from a church in England, on a dark cloudy day, they saw a ship's anchor fastened in a heap of stones, with its cable reaching up from it to the clouds. Presently they saw the cable strained, as if the crew were trying to haul it up, but it still stuck fast. Voices were then heard above the clouds, apparently in clamorous debate, and a sailor came sliding down the cable. As soon as he touched the ground the crowd gathered round him, and he died, like a man drowned at sea, suffocated by our damp thick atmosphere. An hour afterwards his shipmates cut their cable and sailed away; and the anchor they had left

behind was made into fastenings and ornaments for the church door, in memory of the wondrous event.¹

MITHRAISM AND DERIVATIVE RELIGION

Life in The Recognitions is revealed as mysterious, something that "must be led in the dark" (p. 530); something that drowns man with details, the Town Carpenter might add. Furthermore, "First-hand experience," philosophizes Fr. Martin, "is daily more difficult to reach" (p. 952). Reverend Gwyon's life is an attempt to penetrate this mystery and discover its source, particularly the source of religion. Wyatt's searching, in fact, is really only a second-rate imitation of his father's (as well as the Town Carpenter's "voyage of discovery," [p. 422]). Gwyon spends years reading books of world philosophy, religion, magic, and religious rituals. His name "comes from a word in Robert Graves' The White Goddess which means leader."² The name also resembles that of the pre-Christian god, Gwyn, who is a

¹Walter K. Kelly, Curiosities of Indo-European Tradition and Folk-Lore (London: Chapman and Hall, 1863), pp. 1-14. Excerpt in Peasant Customs and Savage Myths: Selections from the British Folklorists, ed. Richard M. Donson (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968), vol. 1.

²Koenig, p. 63.

symbol of rebirth. Through his study Gwyon is reborn in the novel and from him stems a good deal of the The Recognitions' view of the nature of reality. Gwyon is an enigmatic character immersed very much in his own world, sometimes seeming merely eccentric and insane, but at others profound. Gaddis, through his presumably omniscient third person narrator, implies that Gwyon is a character to be taken seriously:

Not to be confused with that state of polished bigots, mental obstinacy, financial security, sensual atrophy, emotional penury, and spiritual collapse, which, under the name "maturity," animated lives around him, it might be said that Reverend Gwyon had reached maturity" (p. 396).

Gwyon's reading indicates that a subject of preoccupation to him is mysticism. He reads numerous works on the subject, particularly those of St. John of the Cross. In fact, after his death his will is found in a copy of The Dark Night of the Soul (p. 717), also the place where he keeps his bottle as a substitute for the difficult-to-attain mystical experience.

There seems to be no clear indication, however, that Gaddis's novel promulgates mysticism as a final key to reality; but it does seem that there is an awareness that many throughout man's history have seen it as a deep recognition, the ultimate recognition, of the nature of existence and that much of religious life as the twentieth century knows it is an interpretation of

the mystical experience, though frequently it is confused with ethics and morals. In contrast to the mystical experience in which everything that is is unified, the novel establishes the concept that in everyday reality "life is lived in fragments" (p. 300). One important mystical allusion opens Part II of the novel:

A thousand accidents may and will interpose
a veil between our present consciousness
and the secret inscriptions of the mind;
but whether veiled or unveiled, the inscription
remains forever; just as the stars seem
to withdraw before the common light of day;
whereas in fact we all know that it is the
light which is drawn over them as a veil,
and that they are waiting to be revealed when
the obscuring daylight shall have withdrawn.
--Thomas De Quincey (p. 28).

Reverend Gwyon's years of contemplation lead him to worshipping Mithras, the Persian god of light who fought on the side of truth in the eternal struggles between the powers of good and evil, light and darkness. "Mithras," he tells Wyatt, is "the power behind the Sun" (p. 432). Gwyon, then, more or less regresses into man's history to one of the earliest forms of religion, hence religion in a relatively pure or simplified state. Gwyon is fascinated by the discovery of a Mithraic shrine underneath St. Clement's Basilica in Rome (a non-fictional fact). He is so inspired he converts his New England church into a Mithraic shrine where he recreates primitive ritualistic sacrifices, a traditional

method of seeking atonement. Not surprisingly, his congregation puts him away. Undoubtedly, however, there is truth to be found in his conversation. The Mithraic shrine underneath the Basilica stands as another unifying symbol in the novel, suggesting the counterfeit nature of reality: "As Frazer says, Max explained indulgently,--the whole history of religion is a continuous attempt to reconcile old custom with new reason, to find sound theory for absurd practices" (p. 535). In the process of reconciliation, "gods, superceded, become the devils in the system which supplants their reign" (p. 102). Gwyon's voyage of discovery, then, is a symbolic attempt at reaching back to the origins of religion, for "a time before death entered the world, before accident, before magic, and before magic disappeared to become religion" (p. 12).

His Mithraic worship is an attempt at recreating the roots of man's original religious reverence for the world in which he found himself: "that is in the sense of devotion, adoration, celebration of deity, before religion became confused with systems of ethics and morality, to become a sore affliction upon the very thing it had once exalted" (p. 311). Gwyon is led to animistic respect for the sun, a very popular deity throughout man's history, known to be used by Christianity itself as a representative of Christ. To summarize

briefly its history, the worship of the sun evolved in Hinduism to the worship of a deity called Mitra, who is copied by Zoroastrianism and called Mithra, later Mithras by the Romans whose Mithraic cult, in fact, was a major competitor of Christianity. This progression of sun worship from animistic religion through Eastern and Western religions exemplifies the counterfeit nature of religion. In The Recognitions, then, Mithraism re-surfaces as a representative of the incestuous nature of religion, as well as reality. This incestuous nature is well detailed in one of Gwyon's sermons:

True, many stirred with indignant discomfort after listening to the familiar story of virgin birth on December twenty-fifth, mutilation and resurrection, to find they had been attending, not Christ, but Bacchus, Osiris, Krishna, Adonis, Marduk, Balder, Attis, Amphion, or Quetzalcoatl. They recalled the sad day the sun was darkened; but they did not remember the occasion as being the death of Julius Caesar. And many hurried home to closet themselves with their Bibles after the sermon on the Trinity, which proved to be Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva; as they did after the recital of the Immaculate Conception, where the seed entered in spiritual form, bringing forth, in virginal modesty, Romulus and Remus. (p. 56)

Gwyon's turning point in his religious stance presumably happened in conjunction with his San Zwingli experience. Appropriately, Hildreich Zwingli, the sixteenth century religious reformist, rejected scholasticism, and like Reverend Gwyon had "the desire to explore the source, to get back to the simplicities of primitive Christianity,

to the pure, untainted Church of the NT."³ Zwingli was a firm believer in faith over reason in matters of religious understanding. Later Wyatt undergoes similar epiphanies in the Spanish town of San Zwingli in his search for the genuine.

THE CORRUPTION OF RELIGION

Religion in The Recognitions is not only exposed as derivative but as corrupted and, therefore, denied of much of its redemptive powers and meaningfulness.

In light of Gwyon's revelation of the derivative nature of religion, many of man's prejudices and practices in the name of religion are exposed as ignorant and religiously undermining. Numerous references are made throughout the novel to these prejudices and practices that turn spiritual religions into petty social cliques. Gaddis establishes this theme early. The first part of the novel suggests the tension between Protestants and Catholics. Gwyon's in-laws "refused to forgive his not bringing Camilla's body home [from the Catholic Spain], for deposit in the clean Protestant soil of New England. It was their cross, and they bore it away toward a bleak exclusive Calvary with admirable

³Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, XII (1922), 875.

Puritan indulgence" (p. 3). On the other side, Catholics are depicted as similarly guilty. Once Gwyon goes to a Spanish monastery where

He was admitted as a curiosity, for few had ever seen a living Protestante, let alone one of their caudillos. But for Fr. Manomeurta, the organist, their guest might have been invited elsewhere; had not the confessor to the young king recently declared that to eat with a Protestante was to nominate one's self for excommunication? (p. 11).

Aunt May is markedly prejudiced:

Few things seemed to stir her pleasantly but news of unhappy occurrences in Italy: whether storms or strikes or railway accidents, she saw imminent in them the fall of Rome. She waited, contemplating wholesale damnation for the whole non-Christian world with an eye as level as that of Saint Bonaventure; no more mother than he, the prospect of eternal roasting for millions of unbaptized children did not bring the flutter of an eyelash: "the sight of the damned heaps up the measure of the accidental joys of the righteous" (p. 38).

It is noted that "two centuries before, Reverend John H. Gwyon had been butchered by disaffectionate Indians whose myth he had tried to replace with his own" (p. 22). Gwyon points out in a sermon that "Moses had been accused of witchcraft in the Koran" (p. 55) and "that Charlemagne mass-baptized Saxons by driving them through a river being blessed upstream by his bishops, while Saint Olaf made his subjects choose between baptism and death" (p. 56). Even within groups united under one religion segregation exists: "the Franciscans were

canonized for the very things the Waldensians were burned alive for" (p. 921). "It won't be long," Max seriously jokes, "before they're sacrificing Christ to God as God's immortal enemy" (p. 536). Given religious history as it is detailed in The Recognitions, there is every reason to believe this will occur.

Another problem with religion, which Gaddis covers early, is the life-denial some followers create. He writes of a fourteenth century monastery of an "order since distinguished. Its sense of guilt was so great, and measures of atonement so stringent, that those who came through alive were a source of embarrassment to lax groups of religious who coddled themselves with occasional food and sleep" (p. 9). In the monastery

There was the cell where Fr. Eulalio, a thriving lunatic of eighty-six who was castigating himself for unchristian pride at having all the vowels in his name, and greatly revered for his continuous weeping, went blind in an ecstasy of such howling proportions that his canonization was assured. He was surnamed Epiclantos, "weeping so much," and the quicklime he had been rubbing into his eyes was put back into the garden where it belonged (p. 10).

The character in the book most memorable for life-denial is Aunt May.

She was sixty-three. It was not, in her case, a ripe age, but quite the other way, a systematic reduction of unfertile years and thoughts, disapprobation, generally a life bounded by terms of negation, satisfied with its resistance to any temptation which might have borne fruit. Better to marry than to burn, but she had not been

forced to that pusillanimous choice: gnarled, she stepped from one virginity to another without hesitation.***She seemed in a hurry to be gone from that body (p. 40).

She makes Wyatt eat his meals from didactic bowls: "Unlike children who are encouraged to down their food by the familiar spoon-scraped prize of happy animals cartooned in the bottom of the dish, Wyatt hurried through every drab meal to meet a Deadly Sin" (p. 30). Wyatt is driven from religious commitment because of the negative associations he makes with Aunt May's religious sense. After he hears her plans to make him a minister, "he never asked the Lord to make him strong and healthy again" (p.30). By the time he was four "Wyatt was, in fact, finding the Christian system suspect" (p. 21).

Materialism is another cause of religious failure discussed. One sun-worshipping Dynasty, that of Ikhnaton, "went to pot," it is noted. "Too much gold, that was their difficulty, gold kicking around all over the place, and vulgarity everywhere, eh? Yes, that's what happens, that's when decadence sets in, eh?" (p. 658). Anselm asks "If you think the Church wouldn't do an about-face on contraceptives if it owned a block of stock in Akron rubber! And how much real estate do you think they own in this whorehouse of a world?" (p. 184). Senor Hermoso points out regarding the canonization taking place throughout the novel that "Such a thing costs money.***

Such sums of money that perhaps only someone of your [Gwyon's] position could understand? Too much, perhaps, it is to say, for these poor and ignorant people who need the blessed care of a patron saint so much" (p. 17). The embodiment of materialism in The Recognitions is Recktall Brown. He is obsessed with money and, to an extent, power. It is Brown whom Wyatt must fight to free himself to attain salvation. As Valentine says, "Rectall Brown is reality" (p. 244), implying the inevitability of conflict between valid spiritual experience and matter. One result of man's material origins is his need for theatricality. The monastery of the extinguished order of Eulalio contrasts markedly with their flagellating life style,

with turreted walls, parapets, crenelations, machicolations, bartizans, a harrowing variety of domes and spires in staggering Romanesque, Byzantine effulgence, and Gothic run riot in mullioned windows, window tracings, and an immense rose window whose foliations were so elaborate that it was never furnished with glass (p. 9).

Architectural excesses like these, rationalized as art for the glory of God, are complemented by histrionic religious garb like Gwyon's "resplendent chasuble, black with gold-embroidered skulls-and-bones rampant down the back" that he gives to the San Zwingli monastery along, Gaddis jokes, with "an assortment of tambourines. And that was why, in Christian turn, they reciprocated with the festival" (p. 8) for Camilla's death. According to

Stanley, the image of God himself is not immune: "God has become a sentimental theatrical figure in our literature,***God is a melodramatic device used to throw people in novels into a turmoil" (p. 458).

Evolution is natural, of course, and as Wyatt discovers can result in a perfecting power in art, but in The Recognitions religion is possessed more commonly by entropy of genuine religious insight and experience. Christ's celebration of his life has turned into a bunch of "hocus pocus." "Decay of meaning" is seen everywhere, as in the word enthusiasm: "You're enthusiastic over sealed-beam headlights. Enthousiazein, even two hundred years ago it still meant being filled with the spirit of God" (p. 594). "This is what happens to great emotions," Otto says in another situation, "this is the way they're rotted, by being brought to the lowest level where emotions are cheap and interchangeable" (p. 127). A major cause, of course, of the decay of meaning is the need of the common man for simplification, which frequently results in cheap understandings and misunderstandings, "like so many of the mystic contrivances devised by priesthoods, which slip, slide, and perish in lay hands" (p. 495).

Mr. Pivner is the representative of the common man in Gaddis's novel. According to the narration, his "reading embraced tangible things." His "attention rarely

came up on things at first hand." "What sense in the Buddhists?" (p. 497), he once says. Mr. Sinisterra is similar. His life is literally dedicated to making money; he has little time for significant spiritual concerns, as suggested in his understanding of yogis, about whom he says, "That's a wonderful religion they got, that voodooism" (p. 488). Two couples, Mamie and Bernie and the "tall woman" and her husband, make especially marvelous parodies of laymen who lack any deep understanding of religion. The "tall woman" and her husband go to a Catholic Mass where a priest's Latin, the woman says, "sounded to me like he was saying, I can play dominos better than you can." Mamie tries to impress a Franciscan monk with her religious connections:

My family's in religious novelties. Mostly plastic ones. Last year we got out a plastic shofar, for Yom Kippur. It was filled with candy. It went real well. Show them your key chain, she said to her husband, digging him with an elbow.--See? she said, showing it. There were a good many keys, but she got the plastic enclosed picture free.--See? you just move it a little and his eyes open and close, see his lips move just like in prayer? And the hand he's got up in a benediction even wiggles a little, see? See the halo move when you tip it?... These go real well. It's a whole series of arto-foto key chains. She started to pass this devotional object up the table. (p. 885)

Mamie also has the notion that "once you have extreme unction administered to you, then if you recover you have to eat fish and...renounce matrimonial relations" (p. 885).

In these examples, and others, what began to some as religious profundity becomes secular silliness. During a TV commercial, St. Agnes of the Cross is used to sell "Necrostyle, the wafer-shaped sleeping pill" (p. 365) for a series called The Lives of the Saints, which there is reason to believe will portray cheapened versions of their lives:

The story line is terrific. This poor girl, she lives near Saint Francis, and finally she went around to ask him how she could be a saint too, like he was, except to start one for women. So he said...

--Start one what?

--Like a nunnery, but that's not the point. So he gave her this hair shirt, and told her to go out and beg for awhile, and then come to his place at Portiuncula dressed like a bride. So she did. It's natural. This scene where all these monks meet her with lighted candles and walk her up to the altar.

--Then what. They get married?

--I guess so. Why else would she come dressed like a bride? (pp. 733-734)

There are contemporary laymen in The Recognitions reading the Bible, but in the newspaper, "sbecause [sic] any of these fine people would feel like a jerk reading the Bible in public, they'd be ashamed to. But if they're oney [sic] reading the newspaper, that's all right" (p. 504), says a drunk. About what happens to genuine religious meaning in the hands of laymen, Gwyon says, "That's the trouble today. No mystery. Everything

secularized. No mystery no weight to anything at all" (p. 57). After he is removed from his church, it too becomes virtually secularized. The new minister, "Dick," who eventually abandons the old parsonage, modernizes the church by removing the "gilded organ pipes," "the harsh angle of woodwork," and "the bell" (p. 714), and making other extreme changes which seem to result in a tasteless plastic replica of the original. Once he gives a sermon against Mithraism and in essence his predecessor, to which one of his congregation laments, "there was something...she sniffed.--Something" (p. 719). Again, as in art, the value of religion is based on genuineness within and outside of; and in most of The Recognitions religion falls short either in its external creeds or, more frequently, in its actual practice.

SCIENCE AS SURROGATE

In the world of The Recognitions, where much religion is imperfect and failing and eventually rejected, science is religion's surrogate, with little respect for mystery and the occult.

Science assures us that it is getting nearer to the solution of life, what life is, that is ("the ultimate mystery"), and offers anonymously promulgated submicroscopic chemistry in eager substantiation. But no one has ever begun to explain what happened at the dirt track in Langhorne, Pennsylvania

about twenty-five years ago, when Jimmy Concannon's car threw a wheel, and in a crowd of eleven thousand it killed his mother (p. 566).

Mr. Pivner's religious sense is spent "looking forward, secretly to the day when Science would explain all" (p. 289). After he is innocently jailed for counterfeiting, he presumably undergoes a lobotomy as treatment, inspired by Eddie Zefnic's recommendation "because now science knows what these things are and what to do for them, not like the Dark Ages" (p. 932). Later in this same letter, Eddie says,

I guess you sure must know I didn't ever think anything bad about you when that happened, I mean that you were a criminal or like that, but that just something was wrong somewhere which wasn't your fault but a good scientific explanation for it (p. 934).

Anselm, another time, rejects this kind of smugness and says "at least the Catholics have some idea of humility" (p. 532).

Science throughout The Recognitions is depicted as the modern United States' religion and the realization of alchemistical pursuits: "For today (at a cost of \$10,000 an ounce) it is possible to transmute base metal into gold" (p. 131). Otto is thrilled by this discovery:

As embarrassed by the mention of Christ as he was charmed by the image of gold, the only thing which kept him from dismissing alchemy as the blundering parent of modern chemistry (for a pair of plastic glasses, or a white shirt made from coal-tar

derivatives, were obviously more remarkable, and certainly more useful, than anything Bernhardus Trevisanus turned up) was this very image of gold (p. 131).

Synthesized diamonds too are available in this world as advertised on a bus poster: "The new Wonder Gems Developed in the laboratory More Brilliant than diamonds" (p. 387). Also, says Gwyon, "Science has a fool theory about recognition. Half the forepart of the brain receives an impression, they say, an instant before the other half. When it reaches the second half the brain recognizes it" (p. 414). And about the Mona Lisa, "Science explains it to us now. The man who painted her picture couldn't see what he was doing. She really didn't have an enigmatic smile, that woman. But he couldn't see what he was doing. Leonardo had eye trouble" (p. 870).

Science as depicted in The Recognitions takes things apart and claims understanding, resulting in a series of fragments without mystical, religious, or meaningful unity: "Separateness, that's what went wrong" (p. 874). In the world of Gaddis's novel, God has lost his position and is more frequently found as a casually sacrilegious exlamative. Chaby Sinisterra says, "Jesis how should I know where" (p. 446). A party-goer declares, "Chr-ahst, I mean, you know? I mean Chrahst, don't you wonder what they're trying to do, all of them?" (p. 584). Benny laughs, "That's funny. God" (p. 596), and blows

his nose. In The Recognitions, science has become big business creating a skyline no longer dominated by the medieval cathedral, but by office buildings, which tower over Mr. Pivner and "eight million counterfeits" (p. 283) which comprise New York City:

In the fragment of sky which the buildings permitted above him flags were being lowered. For the full day they had floated, as much as the rain would allow, heraldic devices of marvelous power, far more impressive than a fiery cross, or the six balls of the Medici. A great bell signaled a telephone company which was omnipotent. Three strokes of white lightening on a blue ground hailed an electric company which controlled the allegiances of an office force equal to the medieval duchy of Mantua. (p. 282)

In this landscape, the sun is blocked out, and there is little opportunity, or desire, for "looking about and questioning the sky" (p. 282).

AGAINST RATIONALISM

The unfortunate emergence of science and materialism as a surrogate for modern religious failure is blamed in The Recognitions on the over-respect of reason--as it was originated with Aristotlian logic, re-emerged through the scholasticism of such theologians as Jerome, Augustine, Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, and finally progressed with the secular enlightenment of Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, and Kant. This worship of

reason has moved man's history from the "Ages of Faith," to the "Age of Reason," to the "Age of Publicity" (p. 736). In short, the "ill doing" of the modern world is declared as arising from "ill thinking on matters of faith" (p. 951).

The importance of faith, hope, and charity in the teachings of Christ are shown as obscured and sometimes dominated by various forms of rationalism since his death. Numerous theologians and philosophers throughout church history are subtly, as well as viciously, attacked in The Recognitions for their responsibility in this state of affairs. For example, in the first century the Gnostic leader, Basilius Valentinus (for whom Basil Valentine is named), pronounced that redemption comes chiefly through wisdom. This early Church heresy eventually merged with Manichaeism, noted occasionally in Gaddis's novel, is a major subject in the Clementine Recognitions. St. Augustine is discussed as a figure who withdrew from life for contemplation (p. 488). St. Anselm is noted for ontologically "proving the existence of God" (p. 535). Bacon offers "formidable geometrical proofs of God" (p. 7). Descartes is probably attacked more frequently than any one figure. "Blame Descartes" (p. 393), says Reverend Gwyon in his humorously profound parody of stream-of-consciousness. Another time, Descartes is described as "that energetic

fellow, well educated in Jesuit acrobatics (cognitans, ergo sum-ing) proclaiming "that everything not one's self was an IT, and to be treated so. But Descartes, retiring from life to settle down and prove his own existence, was as ephemeral as some Roger Bacon settling down to construct geometrical proofs of God" (p. 498). Spinoza is recalled for his title the prince of rationalists" (p. 536). Kant, like the others, is attacked more than once. Reminiscent of his support of pure reason is Valentine's comment that Brown and Wyatt "are both projections of my unconscious" (p. 247). The outcome of all this rationalism, this "modernism heresy" (p. 178), is a world of "breakage with pieces everywhere" (p. 616) in which "we've been led to believe today that we are self-sufficient" (pp. 610-611).

Another way in which The Recognitions discusses the issue of reason over intuition is symbolically, in relation to statements about the status of women. The Clementine Recognitions contains some "speculations about male and female prophecy, the element of error coming into life through what is feminine and imperfect... about the fall of man through the female principle."⁴ Gaddis's Recognitions in parody of the original claims the fall of Western civilization leans more towards the

⁴A. C. Headlam, "The Clementine Literature," Journal of Theological Studies, 2 (Oct. 1901), 52.

"male" principle, that of logic. The Devil in the character of Brown says "Wasn't it women brought evil into the world" (p. 348). The hero of Otto's play, Gordon, says, "Any rational person fears romance, my dear Priscilla" (p. 156). And "What does Saint Jerome say about women?" asks Anselm; that "she's the gate of Hell. 'A foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil,' says Chrysostom" (p. 477). The non-rational, like woman, is seen by the more negative characters in the novel as "Thou seducer of mankind, thou root of evil, thou source of avarice, discord, and envy" (p. 200).

With this in mind, the abundance of homosexuals in the book takes on meaning. The drag ball in Harlem emphasizes the interest of this sexual preference. Valentine is a homosexual. So probably is Otto. And Ludy, "the distinguished novelist." In fact, Gaddis pokes fun at the majority of his contemporaries with comments like, "He said he was a writer, and they're always queer nowadays" (p. 321). Proust is mentioned as a homosexual; but significantly D. H. Lawrence, against the dominance of reason over emotion, is found "impotent" with "a homosexual youth in eyeshadow" (p. 195). Agnes Deigh, who surrounds herself with every "fairy in the city" (p. 577), argues against Stanley's marriage to Esme. One character humorously declares:

--I tell you, there's a queer conspiracy to dominate everything. Just look around, the boy with the red hunting cap said, --Queers dominate writing, they dominate the theater, they dominate art. Just try to find a gallery where you can show your pictures if you're not a queer, he added, raising a cigarette between paint-encrusted fingers. --What do you think women look so damned foolish for today? It's because queers design their clothes, queers dictate women's fashions, queers do their hair, queers do all the photography in the fashion magazines. They're purposely making women look more and more idiotic until nobody will want to go to bed with one. It's a conspiracy. (pp. 309-310)

The sexual preference of various characters, then, is a clue to their approach to reason.

There are other fates too that indicate a character's propensity to reason. Valentine dies an insomniac. Brown lives in a room with no movement, nor music ("It makes me nervous," p. 236). Eddie Zefnic, coming "to grips with humanity and learning all about things in science" (p. 933), believes himself virtuous for not going to a concert (p. 934). Pivner, who is more an asexual and thoughtless victim of a sterile chaotic rationalistic world, has a brain operation (as recommended by the scientific-minded Eddie Zefnic) to correct his counterfeiting (an incorrect judicial verdict), which cuts off his "mid-brain which is where you have the emotions" (p. 933). Nearly everyone (with some notable exceptions--Esme and Fr. Martin) on the pilgrimage are seasick, symbolizing their lack of comfort,

alienation, and despair in "the celestial sea."

Probably representative of the dying belief in the irrational (including faith, hope, charity, awe, wonder, mystery, ritual, and intuition) is Esme's struggle to survive. She is the twentieth century Madonna, "the B.V.M. incarnate" (p. 913), used, abused, ignored, and misunderstood, in an environment of science, Christian Science, homosexual writers, and materialistic masses. She loves Stanley and he loves her and she is pregnant (p. 927), but she does not give birth because a disease contracted from kissing the statue of St. Peter (the church's original distruster of women) kills her.

Although Esme dies, at least another woman in the novel seems to represent the possibility of the triumph of faith over reason. Janet is retarded and so hardly an intellectual, but she perhaps approaches sainthood more than anyone else in the novel. She seems to understand love. Once she demonstrates that she alone can control a bull, designating creative energy and emotion. Making a "moaning sound," she persuades the all black bull to come to her immediately, with "not a moment wasted" (p. 403). Without Aristotelian logic, she experiences reality directly, and with understanding she feels truth. In accord with the traditional proof of sainthood, she is credited with a miracle: the Town Carpenter thanks her for her "healing miracle" that

restores the use of his legs (p. 402).

Wyatt's role in the debate over reason and faith is appropriately mixed. In his early career, for one instance, he probably flirts with homosexuality through Han and Otto. Also, he shows strong allegiance to the rationalistic Valentine. Once he explains to Valentine about his rational stance:

When still a boy I read Novalis, and there was a great appeal, you know. But after a few more years of study I understood the mistake I'd made, the romantic mistake I'd almost made, I saw eventually how Novalis had appealed to all the most dangerous parts of me, all the romantic and dangerous parts, so I settled down to extinguish them. After two or three years I emerged triumphant, to tell the truth quite pleased with myself, to be rid of all these romantic threats which would have killed me if they had taken me unawares [sic]. Thus cleansed, I went on in the rational spirit, easily spotted romantic snares and stepped aside. One day I picked up the work of a man named Friedrich von Hardenberg, and my rational mind become quite inflamed, with the logical answers to just the things I's been questioning...since I'd turned my back on Novalis, and all he stood for. (pp. 379-380)

The self-delusion of this stance is exposed upon recognition that Novalis is the pen-name of the romantic von Hardenberg. Wyatt changes his beliefs, however, and at the point he recognizes that "there was the gold to forge" (pp. 689 and 693)--there is a genuine artistic and religious emotional foundation for the modern counterfeits--he rejects Valentine's rationalistic hold on him and stabs the man. In his flight away, he

encounters Han, whom he kills in self defense. Finally, as the next chapter discusses, Wyatt begins to balance reason with love and other irrational forces.

Chapter 4

SEPARATENESS, WHAT WENT WRONG

Beyond The Recognitions' explorations of the realms of art and religion in its search for reality, the book also examines individuals themselves and their interpersonal relationships, in a world of separation, no longer dominated by absolute beliefs, institutions, and values. Again, counterfeiting is discovered. In this case, people are revealed as frequently phony imitations, masking themselves, in need of union with the universe, but substituting lesser phenomena. The possibility of love as a unifying force with something outside the self is seen as a means to achieve individual meaning. Wyatt, especially, learns that art without love is false. In the end, reality is acknowledged to be composed of inseparable dualisms.

MASKING

The theme of people as counterfeits is a significant one. A multitude of characters are depicted as phonies who forge their personal identities by masking themselves.

This theme coincides with the book's general preoccupation with imitating, copying for the better or the worst. The opening sentence of the novel begins this theme, mentioning masquerades and masks: "Even Camilla had enjoyed masquerades, of the safe sort where the mask may be dropped at that critical moment it presumes itself as reality" (p. 3). The paragraph continues, noting that the dead Camilla is participating in her funeral. Soon after, the narration reveals that she died under the hands of Mr. Sinisterra, who falsely claimed to be a surgeon. Later in the novel Mr. Sinisterra again fakes his identity, verified by a doctored-up passport calling him Mr. Yák. Another character, the "Big Unshaven Man," occasionally appears in the novel pretending to be Ernest Hemingway. Mr. Inononu is a spy, who passes himself off as an Egyptologist calling himself Mr. Kuvetli. Perhaps the most disguised character is Valentine, who is a double agent. In addition to his half-way pose as an art critic, he works for a Hungarian regime, but presumably is a Jesuit (a rationalistic order) attempting to restore the monarchy of the Hapsburgs (p. 650).

People masking themselves on a literal level is also dealt with in one scene in the book which takes place at a transvestite party in Harlem, where even the sex of some becomes confusing and the real is mistaken

for the fake: "Adeline returned to the table alone. --I was dancing with some guy and he suddenly let go of me and said, You are a girl, aren't you, and left me right in the middle of the floor" (p. 311). At another party, a guest remarks about masking in a less literal sense: "I feel so naked, don't you? among all these frightfully masked people. Remember de Maupassant, Guy de Maupassant of course, writing to that Russian girl, 'I mask myself among masked people'" (p. 177). Masking, however, is not limited to social gatherings, but can become a way of life, as some suspect of Reverend Gwyon: "There were a few, of an intuitive nature seldom had in such a community, who suspected his charity to be a mask behind which he dissembled a sense of humor to mock them all. The Town Carpenter was one of these" (p. 25).

Frequently the masking is done out of vanity, as in the case of the critic whose hair is worn

as consciously as the eighteenth century man, though not for reason of that infestation of daunted vanity known as fashion, but for his own unintimidated reason: it made his head look bigger, inferring its contents to be a brain of the proportions which Science assures us we all might have, if we had wings (p. 576).

Agnes Deigh's face is defined by a mask of make-up:

In the street she walked briskly, not a stitch or line out of place, her make-up set in a mask. An unshaven cripple, who'd come forth with an open hand, to be charitably avoided by a turn of her hips, retired saying to a passer-by, --You couldn't take her out in the rain (p. 298).

In at least one vain attempt at self-masking, the masker becomes a victim of his own vanity. Big Anna falls asleep while darkening his Swedish complexion under a sunlamp during a blizzard and receives what he labels "sunstroke" and "second-degree burns at the very least" (p. 558). Although the humor here may be black, other situations of vain masking are pure slapstick. Once Sinisterra (as Mr. Yák) in frantic haste to open his door puts on his wig backwards. Wyatt (as Stephan Asche) tells him "It's backwards." to which Sinisterra exclaims, "Oh! Oh! Oh!" as he "spun the shock of hair round on his head, and opened the door the margin of an eye" (p. 795). Another time, the "tall woman" dinner guest at the San Zwingli monastery says "La Comedia está muy bien." This line not only subtly parodies the conversation going on, but leads to more humorous masking:

and the Franciscan, who had not been to the theater since he took orders, inclined his head to acknowledge her kind manner, though she could not see if he wore his kind smile because he held a napkin over his mouth with one hand, picking his teeth with the other (p. 886).

Another character in the monastery is the phony novelist, Ludy. Although he goes to the monastery for deep spiritual experiences and forever feigns them, they are little more than pretensions. On one of what "he'd have called a meditative walk" (p. 891), he strolls into the country and ostensibly becomes enraptured with its

beauty, but actually he is masturbating:

he stood there as though this betrayal of rural tranquility had engaged his whole attention, as though some innocent line from the Eclogues had turned up for the first time since he'd left Vergil behind in a dusty schoolroom and never read Latin again anywhere but on public buildings. It was an expression of rapt, almost beatified innocence, one seldom seen but on the faces of men carrying on some vile commission underhand; or something which they, for childhood's shame, consider vile. Then he realized he was being watched.

Ludy recognizes the viewer as Stephen, who really is meditatively engrossed in the landscape, at which point "He hastened to button up the Irish thorn-proof trousers and approach with a greeting to belie his embarrassment" (p. 892). (The thorn-proof trousers which he constantly wears represents his phoniness by symbolizing his inability to suffer Christ-like as, for example, Wyatt does.)

In one glorious scene the tape which Agnes Deigh sticks on her face over her stretched skin "to discourage wrinkles while she rested" (p. 556) is inadvertently left on for Esther's cocktail party. It takes a yet unmasked little girl to bring the tape to her attention: "What have you got the funny things sticking on your face for?" Agnes feels her face and panickingly murmurs, "Oh my God, and they've been there...why didn't someone..." The unmasking continues, "what are they for, Lady? the child asked as Agnes tore them off, and opened

her compact. --Go along down to Mummy now, for God's sake" (p. 598).

This encounter is only one of numerous exposés of masked people at Esther's party. Although they do not wear physical masks, several guests unsuccessfully attempt to cover up their ignorance. After one party-goer says, "He's in Paris. He wrote that he's just bought one of those delightful Renaults," another says, "Oh yes, I do love them. An original?" (p. 569). A third guest says, "He's been talking for simply hours about the solids in Oochello. Wherever that is" (p. 570). Another guest brags of Ruskin: "He was in town just last week, wasn't he? said the tall woman. --I heard my husband talking about him. They had lunch together, I think...he's doing a book about stones" (p. 571).

Although Gaddis jokes much about masking, the seriousness of the habit is made obvious, for masking not only hides the genuine (and "how can anyone love another, if he does not love himself?" [p. 78]) but frequently results in becoming the real. After years of wear, Mr. Sinisterra finds his wig and fake moustache "failed to come off" when he attempts to remove them (p. 823). Otto once has a dream which further indicates how the mask gradually becomes the real: "I dreamt I had a terrible dream. I was at a film with a woman I

knew very well, and I was pretending to be blind, with my eyeballs looking up under the lids. Then I really was blind and I was walking with a stick with a retracting point" (p. 220). The truth of this dream is emphasized by a similar experience Otto has: after continuous wearing of a phony sling, Otto eventually does break his arm (p. 731). Additionally, he becomes Gordon, the character in his play, who is his ideal self.

A portrait of Brown similarly demonstrates how a pose can become the real. His hands slowly begin to resemble those in his portrait:

It had been painted from a photograph (the sitter too busy to sit more than the instant of the camera's eye) in which his hands, found in the foreground by the undiscriminating lens, were marvelously enlarged. The portrait painter, directed to copy that photograph faithfully and neither talented, nor paid enough, to do otherwise, had with attentive care copied the hands as they were in the picture. And pausing, passing it hundreds of times in the years since, often catching up one hand in the other before him, his hands came to resemble these in the portrait (p. 228).

Here a photographic illusion becomes real, demonstrating how man's perceptions of himself determines his future. Other photographs mentioned in the novel similarly influence reality. Brown sells

Nineteenth-century portraits of blond men with strong chins that he sells for ten times their price, he tells me, to precarious Jews who want nice ancestors.***And they believe it, when the portraits have hung about long enough, common ancestor to their vulgar

selves that everyone else knows, and this other...more beautiful self who...can do more than they can (p. 253).

Here a lie becomes the truth, at least as an illusion in the minds of the buyers.

This concept of how the non-real, whether it takes the form of a mask, a game, a mistake, an illusion, or a fear, becomes the real is further suggested in Wyatt's question to Valentine, "Tell me, have you ever fallen in love with someone already engaged away, and then as time goes on, you begin to suspect that you look like him? Him whom you hated and found ugly?" (p. 379). This relationship between the real and its opposites is philosophically stated in a description which shows awareness of how "the mask and the face become one":

Mr. Pivner's lips moved as he walked. Perhaps it was this complement which gave him, as the seasonal festons gave the pitted face of the city, this intense quality of immediate realization, real no longer opposed to ostensible but now in the abrupt coalescence of necessity, real no longer opposed to factitious nor, as in law, opposed to personal, nor as in philosophy distinguished from ideal, nor the real number of mathematics having no imaginary part, but real filled out to embrace those opponents which made its definition possible and so, once defined, capable of resolving the paradox in the moment when the mask and the face become one, the eternal moment of the Cartesian God, Who can will a circle to be a square. (p. 561)

Esme does not own a mirror out of awareness of how people's vain obsessions with their physical characteristics control their lives. "Mirrors dominate the

people," "They tell your face how to grow," she tells Otto. "They are evil, she said, thinking of her own dream now.--To be trapped in one, and they are evil" (p. 221). Mirror gazing is common in the novel. On many occasions, characters are constantly looking at their reflections, but rarely with recognition. Ludy is one of these mirror gazers. He attempts to convince himself that he is encountering the religious experience he seeks, through mirrors:

at that moment he wore an expression of intent vacancy, his face that of a man having, or about to have, or at the very least sincerely trying to provoke, a religious experience: so it appeared to him, at any rate, when he passed the mirror and confirmed it (p. 857).

No one, however, gazes in the mirror more than Otto, who is the chief phony in the novel. He perpetually watches himself in mirrors, in his efforts to mask his non-identity: "Otto had taken a step back, looking about the room with restrained anticipation in his eyes, and presentiment of greeting in his features as though he were searching for an old friend whom he had expected to see here. He was looking for a mirror" (p. 177). "He enjoyed coming into this lavatory because the mirrors all in a row over the wash basins gave the pleasant illusion of passing one's self at many windows" (p. 161).

With a casual over-the-shoulder glance into the mirror he turned and walked across the

floor, took a Canadian cigarette from the table and lit it, his mirrored reflection intent upon him. He smiled in the mirror. He raised an eyebrow. Better. He moistened his lips, and curled the upper one. Better still. The smile, which had shown in his face obsequious, was gone. He must remember this arrangement: left eyebrow raised, eyelids slightly drawn, lips moistened, parted, down at corners. This was the expression of New York (pp. 159-160).

Otto seeks his identity through an imitation of others, and he is easily discovered. His play contains nothing but plagiarized lines, and many of his social crowd knows this, because many of the lines he steals were originally plagiarized by them. Nearly everything Otto does is part of his self-conscious posing. After returning from Central America, "he would drop on New York bars, by mistake" (p. 166) the few coins he had souvenired. Similarly, "He made certain that he had two extra packages of Emu which he could offer (preferably to ladies), casually indifferent to their choking fumes" (pp. 167-168). But, best of all, he awkwardly wears a phony sling and pretends he was wounded in a Central American revolution. Otto has no real identity of his own, no genuine self. His life is particularly in imitation of Wyatt, of whom he is a parody. He imitates Wyatt, repeats Wyatt's ideas, and has sex with Wyatt's wife and model. Eventually, he becomes Gordon, the protagonist of his own play, and goes to Barbados where his counterfeit money is stolen and he is told by

Dr. Fell that he will "have to start all over again" (p. 950), at which point he rips off the phony cast representing his make-believe suffering. This is all in structural parody of Wyatt's experiences when his name changes to Stephen in Spain and he is reborn, freed from a life of self-denial.

Otto seems to be incapable of experiencing life directly. His play and conversations are merely repetitions of others' ideas. He is phony, dishonest, and hence pitiable. But what he says is another question. Because so much of what he says he has learned from Wyatt and other thinkers, he speaks truth. Furthermore, he is more articulate and perhaps more thorough when expressing Wyatt's ideas than Wyatt himself, who stumbles through his conversations in a method suggestive of deep creative thought. Some of Wyatt's ideas that Otto paraphrases, in fact, the reader never hears directly from Wyatt, since Wyatt secretively guards his perceptions and reserves much of them for interpretation into his paintings. The result, of course, is ironic. What perhaps it demonstrates is that original thinkers are not necessarily the best articulators of their ideas; but rather that others, whose primary concern is with pretense, not original thought, can communicate others' thoughts with more glibness. On another level, this situation parallels the novel's contention that counterfeiting may result in improvement of the original,

though in this case only on the linguistic level. Unfortunately, if Otto ever speaks his own truth the reader does not know it. Otto is like those Valentine speaks of who "are forced to devote all their time to plagiarizing. Their only difficulty is that if they have a spark of wit or wisdom themselves, they're given no credit" (p. 252).

SEPARATION OF PEOPLE

When masking and imitation which becomes the real occur on a grand scale, The Recognitions reveals, the result for the masses is devastating. Personal identity does not exist and personal salvation is questionable. The masses are characterized as plasticized imitations, as if they were poured from moulds:

The streets were filling with people whose work was not their own. They poured out, like buttons from a host of common ladles, though some were of pressed paper, some ivory, some horn, and synthetic pearl, to be put in place, to break, or fall off, lost, rolling into gutters and dark corners where no Omnipotent Hand could reach them, no Omniscient Eye see them; to be replaced, seaming up the habits of this monster they clothed with their lives (p. 329).

With no deep sense of self, the masses are depicted as barely living, as victims of mass counterfeiting:

The streets when he came out, were filled with people recently washed and dressed, people for whom time was not continuum of disease but relentless repetition of

consciousness and unconsciousness, unrelated as day and night, or black and white, evil and good, in independent alternation, like the life and death of insects (p. 69).

On a smaller but still huge scale, Ed Feasley describes to Otto a similarly counterfeited group they belong to: "I mean it's really people like us, you and me, we're the persecuted minority. White, Protestant, male, over twenty-one, I mean we don't belong anywhere, you know? And finally we're all just parodies of each other" (p. 614). New York City, with its millions of inhabitants, proves itself an appropriate locale for much of The Recognitions' development.

Individually, the members of these mass groups are constantly depicted as lonely. Daily, they look for "a place to escape this transition from day to night: a grotesque time of loneliness" (p. 265). They crave recognition: "Isn't there in every one of us, a naked man marching down main street playing a bass drum?" (p. 362), asks Wyatt. But in practice many are afraid of exposing themselves, of letting others experience their genuine selves. They are "afraid of being found out" (p. 231), of admitting their humanness, which is why Brown "still makes a pretty penny from some simple chemical that women use for their menstrual periods, such a delicate necessity that the shame and secrecy involved make it possible to sell it at some absurd price" (p. 243). Worst of all, they "believe that love

is weakness***and they draw away from it" (p. 464). They fear that what Sir John Suckling's poem says is true: "Love is the fart Of every heart; It pains a man when 'tis kept close; And others doth offend, when 'tis let loose" (Gaddis uses semicolons instead of diagonals) (p. 629). In fact, says Gaddis, of the human race, "we are drawing away from one another, that we share only one thing, share the fear of belonging to another, or to others, or to God; love or money" (p. 103). Brown's advice to Fuller about the "whole world" is to "lock it out. You can lock it out" (p. 347).

The figures in Wyatt's paintings resemble the characters of Gaddis's artwork. "Separation," says Valentine,

all of it cluttered with separation,
everything in its own vain shell, every-
thing separate, withdrawn from everything
else. Fear, fear, pessimism and fear and
depression everywhere, the way it is today,
that's why your pictures are so cluttered
with detail, this terror of emptiness,
this absolute terror of space. Because
maybe God isn't watching. Maybe he doesn't
see. (p. 690)

The characters in The Recognitions are immersed in their own vain shells, desperately in need of confirming their identities. "You'd be surprised what a man will do to prove his own existence?" says Mr. Yák, "Why, there's no ruse at all that people will disdain to prove their own existences" (p. 800). In other women, Esther "seemed to find in their problems only weak and distorted

plagiarisms of the monstrous image of her own" (p. 80). Mr. Pivner keeps "a secret and private self locked away from eight million others" (p. 284).

The dentist Agnes Deigh watches regularly from her window stands every afternoon in front of a mirror and

he never noticed her, he never glanced across the court, never anywhere but the mirror, not even when, one day, exasperated at his sloven obduracy, she had stood at her window with her blouse undone, pretending, as a breast slipped into conspicuous sight while she watched him from her eye's corner, to be adjusting an undergarment (p. 294).

In a letter Agnes asks Dr. Weisgall, "How little of us ever meets how little of another" (p. 758). Anselm's insults to a critic are not only symbolic of the critic's intellectual cutting off of others, but of the fate of masses who are locked off from meaningful involvement:

Alone. Go home with your lover, old mister five fingers, haha, haha haha... here he went on, snatching the magazine up from the floor and thrusting it in the face of the other, --here are some girls for you. Here! Do you think I don't know? do you think we all don't know, let's see the calluses on your right hand, old mister five fingers, hahahahahahahuhhhph (p. 636).

It is no coincidence that at least one couple in the novel hopes "to go to Hawaii for the Narcissus Festival" (p. 887).

What the masses in The Recognitions who are vain and separate in their own shells lack is a higher meaning to

bind them together. Gaddis depicts a world in which people are separate without love, without love of something higher than themselves, or without love of each other; and so they live out of contact with other--something outside themselves--in loneliness and emptiness. "It's as though when you lose someone...lose contact with someone you love, then you lose contact with everything, with everyone else, and nobody...and nothing is real any more," says Otto. "For it is worse being alone without someone than just being alone," writes Agnes, who adds that "love is divine" (p. 763). "Life without love," says the retarded Janet, is damnation.

The relationships between many of Gaddis's characters demonstrate people cut off from each other, unable to relate in a meaningful way with sincere mutual love. Their bonds are weak and they are unhappy. Wyatt and Esther's marriage serves as a dominant example: "their ideas and opinions seemed to meet only in passing, each bound in an opposite direction, neither stopping to do more than honor the polite pause of recognition" (p. 84). The bonds between generations are also lacking. There is no successful family life in the book. Agnes's daughter does not correspond with her. Chaby Sinisterra rejects his father. Otto has never met his father. Wyatt is alienated from his father. These defective

relationships represent the serious lack of contact these characters have with their origins. They are cut off from their heritage, from the Western Tradition and from God, however he may be defined.

"People don't say good-bye anymore," says Valentine, "You look up and they're gone, missing" (p. 264). Relationships are described as casual and fleeting, leaving only faint memories: "These pieces of me," says Ed Feasley, "and pieces of other people all screwed up and spread all over the place. I mean there are people you ...do nothing with and then you never see them again" (p. 749). The result of all these tenuous bonds is a T. S. Eliot world of separation and fragments: "Separateness, that's what went wrong," epiphanizes Wyatt, "everything withholding itself from everything else" (p. 874). There is little sense of meaning to most of The Recognitions' characters, little belief or link to anything of what could be called higher values. "And though he was surprised when he realized it, was it really any wonder at all that Mr. Pivner['s]***world was a series of disconnected images, his life a procession of faces reflecting his own anonymity in the streets?" (p. 564). What is missing in the lives of this cast of Prufrocks is a transcendent force, since, as Voltaire would add, "some transcendent judgment is necessary, because nothing is self-sufficient" (p. 617).

This concept that men are not self-sufficient, either as a group or as individuals, is an important one in the novel. The many coincidences of plot in which characters cross paths and influence each others' lives is a dramatization of this theme.

SUBSTITUTIONS FOR AT-ONE-MENT

Scores of individuals in The Recognitions are ultimately uncomfortable with their personal isolation and seek unity--to be at one with something outside the self. In its higher forms, this unity may occur through human love or mystical experience. But much more commonly in Gaddis's novel the love needed to bind the masses and help them overcome their alienation from each other and their environment, is replaced with a large variety of counterfeits, not necessarily bad in themselves, but often used overindulgently and otherwise misguidedly. "Look at them," one party-goer remarks, "watching casual hands pick up stuffed eggs, frankfurters, an occasional carrot.--You'd think they were hungry, the way they eat. Look at that woman in the white fingernails, does she look hungry?" (p. 579). One husband complains about his wife and Iphigenia, "that God damn cut leaf philodendron," which he claims his wife "pays more attention to than" she does to him

(p. 638). Other characters substitute pets for lovers. About Wyatt's Heracles, Aunt May had a sense that "this monkey had replaced Camilla" (p. 32). One woman, obsessed with the virginity of her dog, fits it with a chastity belt. A mother is criticized for loving her dog more than her son:

Tell them, go ahead for Christ's sake
tell them, about your mother and the
Pekinese that the pile of folding chairs
fell on, she picked it up and breathed into
its mouth, she kept it alive breathing her
own life into it but for him? Would she
give him one, breath of love? Or a lot of
gas about love that has nothing to do with
either one of them, for the love of Christ,
for Christ sake, she left him here to cut
his throat for Christ sake (p. 634).

Others need heroes "so badly that they make up special games, hitting a ball with a stick and all kinds of nonsense and the men who win the games are their heroes," complains The Town Carpenter, and then "When that gets stale, they arrange whole wars which have no more reason for existing than the people who fight them" (p. 408). The Town Carpenter also remarks that out of "loneliness" and "nothing to do" (p. 409) people travel:

Go to an airport and look at them, the
miserable lot of them with their empty eyes
and their empty faces, and no idea of what
they're doing but getting out of one pot
into another, weary and worried only for the
comforts of the body, frightened only that
they may discover something between now and
the minute they get where they think they are
going (p. 422).

Of other would-be travelers, Valentine claims, "Their

nostalgia for places they have never been is sex" (p. 385). Thrill-seeking crowds in New York City turn someone else's terror into entertainment. A man contemplating suicide (one of many in the novel) on an eighth story ledge is cheered on by "the rhythm of the crowd's voice" which chants "Jump...jump...jump." (p. 284) louder and louder. What perhaps this crowd seeks is identification with someone else's death wish, death being of course the final union with other. Many seek identification in social clubs and similar cliques, in masking of their personal selves. Others escape through reading "books that make us hate ourselves" (p. 571). And home-imprisoned isolates dial "NERVOUS" to hear "the recorded voice of a woman (dead or alive) who dissected the latest minute on the telephone" (p. 320).

Drugs are another significant means of overcoming the need for unification with other. Maude leaves her "baby there in the sink with what dishes remained" (p. 756) to buy some morphine. Esme is a drug addict. A woman neighbor of Esther screams for help by repeatedly demanding her daughter go to Esther's party in search of all the sleeping pills she can get. The constant interruption of the party by the little girl seems to act as a chorus emphasizing the desperation of the environment. Nectostyle sleeping wafers, "the modern scientific aid to civilized living" (775), a modern replacement for

Holy Communion, advertises itself on TV (another addiction of the modern age), soon to be watched by the masses who also breathe annually "the smoke of forty billion cigarettes" in a country "where a year's relief from love cost eighty-five million dollars in headache remedies; and for faith 15,670,944,200 aspirin tablets, carried like phylacteries" (pp. 212-213).

Probably the most dominant counterfeit in the novel, however, is alcohol. Much of the action takes place at parties which are filled with drinking, in addition to general self-masking. Drunks walking the streets are also not rare occurrences: "Whhhhasafuksa-matter? This delicate question went unanswered, for the man who asked it was alone in the street corner" (p. 503), drunk. Once Mr. Pivner is told about another drunk: "Aw, drunks get lonely sometimes. You know, he don't care what he says, he oney wants to talk to somebody" (p. 284). The whole French culture is described as saturated with alcohol:

the French, with cultured tastes and civilized sensibilities, drank down six billion bottles of wine that year merely to reward their refined palates: so refined, that a vast government subsidy, and a lobby capable of overthrowing cabinets, guaranteed one drink-shop for every ninety inhabitants; so cultivated; that ten per cent of the family budget went on it, the taste initiated before a child could walk; and death at nineteen months of D.T.s (cockeyed on pernod) incidental; so civilized; that one of every twenty-five dead Frenchmen had made the last leap through alcoholism (p. 943).

While drinking can be a substitute for love, drinking is not without its own substitutes. Anselm finds in a magazine advertisement, "Does Drunkenness Threaten Your Happiness or Your Loved Ones: Our Remarkable New Discovery Quickly and Easily Helps Bring Relief from All Desire for Liquor...No Will Power Is Necessary To Stop Drinking" (p. 527). Otto goes to a bar that not only cheers the spirits of its inhabitants but creates the illusion of a better self:

The mirror behind the bar was tinted, and of such a slight convexity that those who appeared within its confines wore healthy complexions, figures not distorted but faces slightly slimmer, and he appeared the more grave, she assumed delicacy, lost weight and the years gathered conspiring under the chin. Otto's pale lips, drawn in tension, appeared as thin dark lines of determinism; the straggle of hairs on the upper lip a diffidently distinctive mustache (p. 506).

Another counterfeit of the modern world existing throughout the novel is a multitude of analysts, for a huge "assortment of aggressive ulcerated men" (p. 289), suicidal depressants, and other neurotics. Esther and Max are two of these, to name only a couple. Even Huki-Lau is a patient, says the neurotic dog's owner: "Her name is Juki-lau; that means fish-picnic in Hawaiian; isn't that cute? She used to bite her nails right down to the quick; analysis is doing her a world of good" (p. 739).

All in all, masses of The Recognitions' characters

seek meaning through materialism. They live in a world "in which the things worth being were so easily exchanged for the things worth having" (p. 131). In their world, "Money," observes Brown, "gives significance to anything" (p. 144). Money is religion, the force that binds people; it owns them. When the powerful Brown has his fatal accident at his party, both Fuller and Wyatt are freed. Likewise, Brown's guests abandon him when he dies, since it is his material goods they seek and not him: "a number of people, in fact, suddenly recalled other engagements and hurried off to fill them" (p. 680). No one mourns for the death of Brown, who cares not for people or truth, but money. He is like Harry the novelist, who is being sued by Agnes, not because she needs the money, but because "Money is the only language he understands" (p. 295). How much or how little a character is concerned with money in the novel is a key to his worth, at least in general. Otto, for example is once insulted by Stanley who tells him. "You have a real complex about money don't you Otto, a real castration complex without it" (p. 463). Modern American couples are depicted as having little more in common than money: women spend "the afternoon spending the money that their weary husbands had spent the afternoon making, the same husbands who would arrive home minutes after they did, mix a drink; and sit staring in

the opposite direction" (pp. 302-303). Dale Carnegie's How to Win Friends and Influence People is attacked because

it decreed virtue not for virtue's sake (as weary stoics had it); nor courtesy for courtesy (an attribute of human dignity, as civilized culture would have it); nor love (as Christ had it); nor a faith which is its own explanation and its own justification (as any faith has it); but all of these excellences oriented toward the market place (pp. 498-499).

It is noted that

To prepare for his hand book on human relations, the author had read "everything that [he] could find on the subject, everything from Dorothy Dix, the divorce-court records, and the Parent's Magazine..." to three popular psychologists. He even hired a man to go to libraries and read everything he himself had missed. They spared "no time, no expense, to discover every practical idea that anyone had ever used throughout the ages to win friends and influence people" (p. 500).

Here, then, in Carnegie's book, is what may be considered the culmination of the wisdom of the world on interpersonal relationships, but its primary purpose is to aid businessmen in making money.

Wyatt once questions whether he should release himself through a prostitute supplied by Brown "Without love?" (p. 360). On other occasions, sex without love is examined with suggestions that it threatens love. One of these times Stanley reflects:

Why just exactly the things that used to be the aspirations of life, those are just the things that have become the tolls? I

mean, like...well like girls having babies? They used to be the fruit of love, the thing people prayed for above everything, and now, now they're the price of... Everything's sort of contraceptive, everything wherever you look is against conceiving, until finally you can't conceive any more. Then the time comes when you want something to work for, the thing you've been denying all your life, and then it won't work (p. 459).

Partners to have sex with and show off to others are the goals of many, rather than love.

You see all the fat ugly men with beautiful girls? All the wrong people have the money now, that's because ugly people make money because there's no alternative. When you're ugly nobody spoils you, you see reality young and you see beautiful things as something separate from you you're going to have to buy. So you start right out thinking money (p. 624).

Love in The Recognitions is rare, and replaced with a sense of partners as commodities. The Swede is another character who sees others primarily as sexual objects. He even converts to Catholicism solely "to get hold of little Giono" (p. 825).

In this sterile world, where there is "a sense of something lost" (p. 501), Mr. Pivner, like J. Alfred Prufrock, stands as a representative of the businessman destined to a life of futility, without higher achievement:

He had forgotten, not that sunsets did occur, but what a sunset was; or the flight of a bird; the movement of water against a shore; the freshness of air consciously breathed; distances seen over land; the sound

of wind in a green tree; or the silent
incredible progress of a snail (p. 286).

Pivner spends his life "waiting for something to happen" (p. 288). He is a very lonely man, who turns on the radio to hear "a comforting confusion of sound" (p. 285), who neurotically and mistakenly hears his phone ring ["Hello? hello, operator? His hand quivered over the dial.***Operator? Oh, didn't this...I'm sorry, I thought I heard it ring" (p. 562)], and who daily goes to bed "in nervous imitation of sleep" (p. 329). When something finally does happen to him he is innocently jailed for passing counterfeit money and continues his fate as a victim of his counterfeit world.

LOVE AS A UNIFYING FORCE

Although cheap imitations of love abound in The Recognitions, the novel does not exclude the possibility of love's existence. The relationship between Stanley and Esme involves loving, but not completely fulfilled love, because both are killed by the reality of matter; Esme from a disease contracted when she kisses the foot of the statue of St.-Peter-in-the-boat (St. Peter did not acknowledge the value of the "female" principle) and Stanley by the collapse of the cathedral at Fenestrula. Both Stanley and Esme are capable of real love because they are capable of giving. Stanley, in

particular, realizes the necessity of love for meaningful existence, particularly the love of a serious artist, "love for something higher" (p.632): "But isn't there a moment...Stanley went on, --a moment when love and necessity become the same thing?" (p. 465). Most other characters, however, can only take and use others for personal gain. "God is love" (p. 532), prophesies Anselm. A world without love for something higher, a world in need of bonds between people and between higher ideals, is characterized as a fragmented world, doomed to chaos and sterility.

The love between Stanley and Esme parallels Wyatt's understanding of the need for love. Ultimately, Wyatt's voyaging leads him to some understanding of the need of love for salvation; and so, in echo of Stanley, Wyatt acclaims that there is "a moment in travel when love and necessity become the same thing" (p. 898). But Wyatt's journey before he learns this lesson is a long, tormented, and corrupted one.

Throughout most of the novel Wyatt is such a martyr to his art he is incapable of loving and giving to others. His marriage is a failure. Esther tells him "You never will let yourself be happy," "even your smile isn't alive, because you abdicated, you moved out of life" (p. 590). She begs him to show emotion: "I wish you would lose your temper, she had said, --or

something because this...this restraint, this pose, this control that you've cultivated, Wyatt, it becomes inhuman...He just looked at her" (p. 97). She feels "If he does not love me, then he is incapable of love" (p. 94). Once she claims to a policeman that "he's a priest" (p. 117) because of his celibate relationship with her. Wyatt keeps himself in, blocking out others. He irritatedly notes to Yák that "I just don't like people's hands on me" (p. 779). Yák observes that the picture in the Swiss passport looks like Wyatt: "It's just like you, just like I said, that square face all screwed up around the eyes" (p. 795). When Wyatt is moved emotionally, he becomes very intense and stays still without expressing his emotions outwardly. His re-occurring dream that his hair is burning--symbol of his self-consumption, his martyrdom for art--also represents his inability to love and give to others: Once Fuller remarks about burning hair, "That's what evil smells like" (p. 445).

Throughout the novel, however, Wyatt proves himself a tremendously dynamic character who grows dramatically beyond his shortcomings and begins to redeem himself. As his artistic sense matures (frequently merely through accidents of his environment) he learns more and more from his art and from those around him. Esther's comment that "The boundaries between good and evil must be

redefined again, they must be re-established, that's what a man must do today" perhaps aids Wyatt in clarifying further his search. Wyatt responds to her comment about the need "to set up order once more between yourself and the world" with his awareness that "The only way we can know ourselves to be real is this moral action***morality isn't just theory and ideas, that the only way to reality is the moral sense" (pp. 590-591).

By the end of the novel Wyatt's wandering leads him to San Zwingli and a growing ability to understand that art without love is false, at which point he becomes reborn and redeems himself. He is struck again with the fever of his childhood (p. 800) from which he awakens with new insights, and "for the first time" recognizes a "sense of something lost" (p. 821). He learns that love of higher values is profoundly important but that it is incomplete without love of fellow humans. Much of Wyatt's new knowledge of love begins during the Christmas season and culminates the next spring during Easter time. At this point his martyrdom becomes more bearable because "You can stand suffering if it means something" (p. 530), as Anselm says. Wyatt finally emerges from his incomplete nameless identity and becomes Stephan Asche, then Stephen, after the first martyr and saint, Stephen (the name his parents had originally intended for him). Symbolizing his release

from domination from reason is Wyatt's dream:

I heard a child crying somewhere, that was all I heard. But I thought I'd slept all night and it was dawn. Then I tried to use my right arm, I reached out for a cigarette and it wouldn't work, my arm wouldn't work, it just hung there and fell over, and I...and all I could hear was a child crying somewhere (p. 807).

This dream takes on meaning when the reader recalls

Don's wife's reading of Wyatt's hands:

Your left hand is so gentle, so soft, it understands, and your right hand is so rough, that means your judgment is much better than your will, why do you try to follow your will as though it ran your life? Your left hand does, but you work against yourself, don't you, so stubborn, not happy, not happy, your left hand has love, what a lonely person you are, good God! (p. 107).

Wyatt's dream, then, indicates Wyatt's beginning understanding of the need for love, as well as the emerging freedom from his sense of puritanical guilt. Later, Wyatt's dream is re-inforced with an actual occurrence of finding his right arm "half" asleep and "my heart beating as though it would break through my collarbone" (p. 893). Wyatt recognizes that love can unite the fragments of nihilism.

His perception of the unifying powers of love is also seen in his description of the paintings he saw at the art museum: he says that the Bosch and Breugel and Patinir and Burer are made up of "separations," but that "the harmony in one canvas of El Greco is all one... one...He had both hands out before him now, the fingers

turned in and the thumbs up as though holding something he was studying with a life which Mr. Yák had not seen in his face before" (p. 807). El Greco, of course, is known for the deep emotion he portrays in his paintings. In an effort to redeem his cruelty to Esther, Wyatt becomes involved with Pastora, although this is a less than ideal relationship. Later Wyatt alludes to "A daughter, yes! and born out of not love but borne out of love" (pp. 897-898). Very possibly this daughter is Pastora's and is the child Wyatt hears crying in his dream. The child symbolizes potency of feeling, the fruit of love; and it contrasts markedly with the general lack of conception in the novel. Maude and Army are unable to have a child and seek to adopt a Swedish one. The Swede, a homosexual, also attempts adoption. Esther's pregnancy turns out to be "an hysterical one" (p. 623). Esme's unborn baby, of course, dies with her mother.

In his conversation with Ludy, Wyatt expounds on the final discoveries on his search for reality. Wyatt is in the monastery as a penitent for, among other things, what he believes is the murder of Valentine, as well as the murder, in self-defense, of Han while he was in the French Foreign Legion. His goal is to find deeper meaning in his life and to seek atonement for his mistakes. Also in the monastery as a penitent is the

man who raped and killed the young virgin soon to be canonized. Through this old man, in particular, Wyatt is able to bring together his last lesson in the novel. He is taught that this other penitent learned love through suffering. Wyatt reveals that he has finally realized the need to love and escape guilty self-absorption and self-punishment: "To tell the truth" (p. 894), he proclaims,

if once you're started living, you're born into sin, then? And how do you atone? By locking yourself up in remorse for what you might have done? Or by living it through. By locking yourself up in remorse with what you know you have done? Or by going back and living it through. By locking yourself up with your work, until it becomes a gessoed surface, all prepared, clean as ivory? Or by living it through. If it was sin from the start, and possible all the time, to know it's possible and avoid it? Or by living it through (p. 896).

This is Wyatt's redefinition of good and evil and how to live with it, his understanding of the nature of reality, which can never be completely understood, but which the grasping of is the most worthwhile endeavor men can engage in. Wyatt accepts sin and its powers for developing personal growth. He no longer believes in "locking himself up" for "killing" Valentine or for his selfishness with Esther. Before Wyatt leaves Ludy, "at last, to live deliberately" (p. 900), he tells him to write down his most significant insight, "Delige et quod vis fac"--"Love and do what you want to" (p. 599). By living

through mankind's mistakes and handicaps, Wyatt seems to be saying mankind "redeems them" (p. 898), rather than drowns in despair. Although truth or God or reality can never totally be understood or conquered, the attempt to understand the ultimate and the attempt to existentially transcend mankind's condition can give men meaning and dignity. Meanwhile, as men seek higher ideals, if they can love each other in the tradition of Christian love, their lives can again be full of positive emotion capable of conceiving a pattern of harmony and unity as found in a painting by El Greco.

DUALISTIC NATURE OF REALITY

Wyatt's discoveries of the necessity of evil and the positive value of love are particular examples of a final recognition in Gaddis's novel, involving the dualistic nature of reality. Gaddis frequently writes in terms of obvious oppositions. Either directly or implicitly: day and night, good and evil, reason and emotion, male and female, snow and heat, God and Satan, black and white, virtue and vice, genuine and counterfeit, real and ideal, real and illusory, Adam and Eve, mysticism and scholasticism, spirit and matter, sterility and fertility, homosexual and heterosexual, heart and brain, knowledge and ignorance, modern and ancient, love

and hate, aristocratic and democratic, capitalism and communism, beauty and ugliness, suffering and elation, heaven and hell, artist and philistine, eternal and transitory, permanence and change, Romanticism and Classicism. These forces, as implied by Wyatt's speech on the necessity of evil, for example, are the sources of tension, energy, opposition that are the basic components of reality.

One cannot exist without the other: "God for His own glory permits devils to work against His will" (p. 201): "good is the absence of evil" (p. 856); dark is the "privation of light" (p. 856). "We only know things in terms of other things" (p. 379), the mature Wyatt might exclaim. Nothing exists by itself. Everything is ultimately related. People define each other. Finally, the path to truth, as the Clementine Recognitions maintains, must "be learnt by the knowledge of syzygies or antitheses...day and night, sun and moon, life and death, light and dark, Adam and Eve." Furthermore, "The main cause of all error, we are told, is the imperfect apprehension of the doctrine of antitheses."¹

The major error which Gaddis deals with is the separation of mind and body, or the rational and the irrational. History has preoccupied itself with reason,

¹Headlam, p. 52.

particularly since the eighteenth century, and because of this man, according to Gaddis, has lost sight of genuine impulses. "Dick"'s sermon indicated just what Christianity has lost by conveying

if not severe awe, moments of anxiety, and if not wonder, moments of acute embarrassment; if he could not tender mystery, he could arouse curiosity, rewarded with ceremony if not ritual, inspiring, if not hope, then sincere desire, if not faith, allegiance, if not charity, tolerance (p. 716) [*Italics inserted to emphasize "the gold there was to forge."*]²

Reason, Gaddis states, as "the daylight's embrace," gives the illusion of "separate identities" (p. 700). But what can be seen is not all that is there. The sun is but one of perhaps a hundred billion stars in the milky way, which is itself only one of a billion known galaxies. Yet, in daylight the stars cannot be seen by the scholastic or the rational mind (p. 281), which has traditionally shunned mysticism.

One figure in The Recognitions who can see the stars, Willie reveals, is Esme, who represents the irrational elements in man. The reference to her as "St. Mary of Egypt" (p. 851) perhaps takes on significance with Gwyon's comment that "There is no mysticism without

²These impulses total seven which, like the seven virtues and the seven sacraments, are in marked opposition to the seven deadly sins emphasized throughout the novel.

Mary" (p. 392). Another character who can see the stars is the Town Carpenter (p. 21), "who was said to have Indian blood" (p. 14), suggesting the relatively ideal unity of the rational and the "savage." "Later on we shall simplify things," he says, "Why, all the others are drowning in details. That's what happens to them, you know. That's where we'll outwit them. We must simplify" (p. 411). This idea of simplification is essentially what Wyatt finally learns through the paintings of Titian, El Greco, and other deeply religious emotionalists. Of El Greco, Wyatt states, he learnt "to simplify" from Titian, "that's where he learned not to be afraid of spaces, not to get lost in details and clutter, and separate everything" (p. 872).

One character, especially, who seems to represent the ideal balancing of opposites the alchemists placed such heavy emphasis on is Willie's friend, the mysterious Father Martin.

Stanley had, a few minutes before, met a priest whom he liked immediately, a man with a plump face which carried joviality easily, but could instantly recover a medieval sternness which, once realized, was there all the time. His name was Father Martin (p. 765).

Significantly, Martin, unlike the rest of the members of the pilgrim ship, was not seasick (p. 824). Conscious that the genuine is so easily veiled by the counterfeit, Martin observes that "We live in a world where first-hand

experience is daily more difficult to reach" (p. 952). And it is he who discusses the etymology of "'atonement' (at-one-ment)" (p. 829), who realizes that making life worthwhile comes not from asserting separate identity, but from the mystical seeking of Oneness. The final words of Martin, the "androgynous" (p. 922), are in conversation with Stanley:

Father Martin listened to him, and talked to him, with an extraordinary gentleness and sternness at once, with a calmness which was never complacent, a strength of understanding (though he never said he understood), an interest which was not patent curiosity to excuse pat answers (for he gave none), and a patient sympathy with the figures Stanley spoke of, a quality which showed itself the deepest aspect of his nature, the most hard earned and rarely realized reality of maturity, which was compassion. He was an extraordinary man,

with his final message to Stanley being "to steady the bewilderment of the heart at everything else" (pp. 951-952).

Chapter 5

THE GOLD FORGED: A SUMMARY

The Recognitions is a major contender for the title "Great American Novel." In a sense, it summarizes the history of American literature, as Tony Tanner suggests:

the problems Gaddis raises and the themes he explores seem to me to be at the heart of American literature, and in looking back to Hawthorne while it looks forward to Pynchon, his novel reminds us of continuities which we might otherwise, perhaps, overlook.¹

The Recognitions, however, goes far beyond merely American themes, for America is depicted as a symbol for the contemporary evolutionary state in the development of man, particularly in the Western world. As the Clementine Recognitions is considered the first Christian novel, Gaddis's Recognitions may be understood as today's updated evaluation of the Western Heritage. The United States is portrayed as "the cultural center of the world" (p. 636); a country in which "banks," not cathedrals, stand "as a symbol of progress" (p. 752); a country in which the "Age of Publicity" (p. 736), with

¹Tanner, City of Words, p. 400.

its seven billion dollar a year advertising budget (p. 653) has emerged. It is the most recent dominating seat of civilization:

Historians, anxious to rescue some semblance of a system for the chaos of the past, point out that since the dawn of civilization, the center of civilization has moved westward: from Polycrates' Asian island and Solon's Athens to Constantine's Roman Empire nine centuries later, on to Charlemagne's Frankish labyrinth, ever onward to Canute the Dane at the millennium, across the Channel to the fourteenth-century England of Edward III it came, gathered its breath there (while word of renaissance breathed behind in Italy) for three centuries, readying for the leap across the sea to shores of a New World, where early settlers (having thrown off that yoke of tyrannical ignorance, religious persecution) promoted a culture founded in pure reason,*** Hard work was the only expression of gratitude their deity exacted and money might be expected to accrue as testimonial.***But like so many of the mystic contrivances devised by priesthoods which slip, slide, and perish in lay hands, this too became a cottage industry. (pp. 494-495)

America is described as a land of "progress" (p. 655), a place where "Reason reigned" (p. 290) and materialism has become an end in itself: "Here in the foremost shambles of time Mr. Pivner stood, heir to that colossus of self-justification, Reason, one of whose first accomplishments was to effectively sever itself from the absurd, irrational, contaminating chaos of the past. Obtruding over centuries of gestation appeared this triumphal abortion: Reason supplied means, and eliminated ends" (p. 290). In this contemporary world, Gaddis creates an atmosphere in which "the sense of something

lost" (pp. 68 and 501) is pervasive, and the world's American Dream is exposed as a worldwide nightmare. America, he suggests, is one of history's most notable syphilitic (p. 848) prostitutes of the deepest and noblest urges of man. It is characterized as a wasteland where "everything wears out," "cars" and "friends" included (p. 615), "where everything was calculated to wear out, made from design to substance with only its wearing out and replacement in view, and that replacement to be replaced" (p. 319). It is a wasteland where perversion and ignorance of all sorts are rampant, a multifaceted symbol for what the history of man has evolved into. It is, according to two lines of fumbled and unpatriotic lyrics of a New Jersey school boy, "My countrey tears a dee," "the land of the the grave" (p. 947).

It is a land full of accumulation and clutter, without spiritual fulfillment, in for a fate like that of the grape arbor Agnes Deigh describes: "The grape arbor collapsed, not with the weight of the fruit for the birds had taken the grapes away, but under the weight of the vines" (p. 763). It is a place of "rootlessness" (p. 144) where "Everything is so transient***so temporary" (p. 459), where "buildings one hundred stories high, built in a day, were obviously going to topple long before, say, the cathedral at Fenestrula, centuries in

building, and standing centuries since" (p. 319). The novel, of course, ends with the collapse of the Fenesteula cathedral unable to sustain the soaring vibrations of Stanley's musical masterpiece of "atone-ment" (p. 956). Wearing his "red" necktie, his "white" shirt, and his "blue" suit (p. 955), Stanley plays his composition of fervent faith on the organ that "was the gift of an American" (p. 904), collapsing the medieval church which proves itself a weakened facade.

The Recognitions, however, is a great American novel not merely because it is a critique of modern American civilization in all its counterfeiting and despair; nor merely because it contains profound discussion of art, Christianity, and love; but because it is an ambitious masterpiece encompassing the breadth of reality itself, ultimately recognizing not only entropy but redemptive possibilities in the forces of existence.

To summarize, the major theme of The Recognitions is the search for reality, meaning, and salvation. This search examines three principal realms: art, religion, and interpersonal relationships, frequently resulting in profound recognitions, most commonly about the counterfeit nature of reality. The chief character in the novel is Wyatt Gwyon (the protagonist is more exactly defined as a composite of assorted variations on Wyatt), whose artistic voyaging and recognizing can be seen as

central to understanding the book. After a long period of a not-so-distinguished apprenticeship, Wyatt comes to a fuller understanding of how art may lead to truth and salvation for the artist through study and imitation of master artists. Through his travels it is suggested that copying for the good may redeem an artist if his work rates high on two continuums of evaluation: genuineness of intent and genuineness of objective meaning, genuineness within and without. Redemptive counterfeiting of the masters includes art that is timeless, truthful, and beautiful; and that comes from the gut and the heart and not merely the intellect. It must stem from the genuine artistic impulses of wonder, dread, and sense of beauty--the artistic gold there is to forge.

Copying or counterfeiting of art, however, may also be self-debasing and artistically entropic: If it is low on the two continuums. If material gain is a primary objective, for example, artistic copying is likely to be self-cheapening rather than self-redeeming. One kind of negative copying is the result of the popularizing of art, bringing it down to a level of accessibility to such a wide audience and catering to popular tastes so much that the genuine artistic perception is lost. Gaddis particularly attacks this practice in literature, and attempts to make his novel counter-entropic,

retaining the depth his theme deserves. Otto Pivner is the anti-thesis of Wyatt, since his work merely contains plagiarized statements that are not from his heart, and thus his play consists only of chaotic fragments without unity. Suffering, Gaddis emphasizes, is prerequisite to producing great art. Unfortunately, the artist lives for his work to such a degree he may be consumed by it.

In his examination of what makes great art, and what makes its opposite, and what unfortunate result exists for the artist, Gaddis alludes indirectly and directly to his novel and himself. Sometimes in self-parody and sometimes in an attempt to enrich the reading of The Recognitions, Gaddis reveals how his novel has been constructed. The reader discovers the work is derivative of other works. For one thing, of the Clementine Recognitions of early Christian literature, as well as Goethe's Faust, for another, of the paintings of fifteenth and sixteenth century Flemish masters, particularly Bosch, at once both a sacrilegious and deeply religious artist. Additionally, The Recognitions depends for its synthesizing vision on an innumerable number of allusions from world literature, painting, music, religion, and culture in general. Through such counterfeiting, Gaddis attempts to produce a masterpiece, though it must necessarily be imperfect.

Finally, by introducing himself into the book as a seemingly very minor character named Willie, Gaddis both acknowledges his humanness through self-parody and cleverly sneaks in keys to the major concerns of his novel. Most importantly, that The Recognitions is an eschatological work in that Gaddis is concerned with personal salvation, in that the book is an attack on rationalism, and in that reality is composed of dichotomies, or delicately balanced oppositions.

Concurrent with Wyatt's strivings to become a master are his alchemical searchings for the riddle of life, the noblest striving possible for man. Art and religion are shown to be closely related, both directing themselves to making life worthwhile. But the truths they seek are ideals, ultimately unattainable and perplexingly complex, composed of layer on layer of counterfeited realities. All in all, truth is found to be a difficult-to-perceive but unified body of elusive multiplicities. The chief character through whom religion is explored is Wyatt's father, the Reverend Gwyon, whose years of pursuit of mystical understanding leads him to Mithraism. Reverend Gwyon's discoveries lead him to see the history of religion as being composed of historical counterfeits of man's earlier impulse, his sense of awe and wonder and mystery--the religious gold there is to forge, resulting in a respect and worship

for the cosmos in which he found himself. Gwyon embraces Mithraism, which symbolizes a relatively pure form of religion, in a quest similar to that of the sixteenth century religious reformist, Hildreich Zwingli, for whom the Spanish town where both the Reverend Gwyon and Wyatt attain their principal perceptions of truth is named.

More conventional religions are characterized as not only counterfeits but as frequently corrupted: bigoted, self-righteous, life-denying, didactic, materialistic, melodramatic, perverted and idolatrous, resulting in entropy of genuine religious insight. Science is seen as the contemporary world's surrogate for religion, ignorantly condescending to the mysterious forces of the occult. As depicted in The Recognitions, science takes things apart and claims understanding but merely separates the world into fragments without mystical, religious, or otherwise spiritual unity. Science coupled with big business is shown as drowning mankind in a sea of mass-produced clutter without a sense of meaning. Rationalism emerges (with such female chauvinistic proponents mentioned liberally throughout the novel as Aristotle, Valentinus, St. Augustine, St. Anselm, Thomas Aquinas, Bacon, Descartes, Spinoza, and Kant) as the chief culprit responsible for modern nihilism and materialism. The novel's preoccupations with homosexuality and comments

on the traditional belief of women as "weaker vessels" (p. 716) represents a predominant Western belief in the dominance of reason as opposed to the non-rational, a prejudice which Gaddis passionately attacks, and for which reason Esme the embodiment of the irrational finds it difficult to survive.

The sense of separation and fragments established in this world by reason is quoted in the novel as "what went wrong." The separation among people is particularly dramatized. Again counterfeiting becomes an important factor, for people are characterized as forgers of their personal identities, masking themselves out of an illusory belief in their separate independent selves. Masking further becomes significant in the novel not only because it hides the genuine, but because it evolves into the real. If masking is over-indulged in, with the result being a loss of the sense of genuine self, the outcome on a grand scale is devastating, for if personal identity does not exist, personal salvation is questionable. Phony individuals produce a lonely alienated society, with little between individuals and each other and with no sense of common purpose, religious or secular. The Recognitions suggests, however, a fundamental need of man for unity with others and with a transcendent force and declares that the attempted satisfaction of this need is sought through a catalogue of

substitutes. Neurotic characters substitute food, plants, pets, games, travel, cheap thrills, cliques, analysts, and most commonly, sex, drugs, and alcohol in an attempt to be one with something outside the self (false at-one-ment). With such pursuits materialism becomes more valued than spiritualism, and life becomes a futile grind with little higher achievement.

Although these cheap imitations of love abound in The Recognitions, and an atmosphere that works against conception is described, the novel does not exclude the possibility of the existence of love--the interpersonal gold there is to forge. Stanley and Esme approach love and by the novel's end so does Wyatt. Throughout the book a tension between the brain and the heart is subtly revealed. Most of what the reader learns is through Wyatt who begins to see the strength of the heart in Part III. At this point Wyatt also realizes the function of good and evil. This dichotomy represents similar dichotomies throughout the novel which are seen as the basic components of reality. A final declaration in the novel insinuates not only that good and evil depend on each other for their existence but that all dichotomies (especially male and female, matter and spirit, genuine and counterfeit, elation and suffering, reason and emotion) define each other and provide potential for personal salvation. Furthermore, just as understanding of these

antitheses provides the path to truth, imperfect apprehension of them, the brain and the heart for example, is a major cause of man's predilection to error.

The Recognitions, then, ultimately is a penetrating philosophic analysis of reality, meaning, and salvation for mankind. On the surface, the immensity of details and complexity of plot give the impression, as a large percentage of the critics of the novel have complained, of chaos and nihilism. Indeed, few would not feel lost, perplexed, and frustrated with initial attempts at reading Gaddis's statement. Most, perhaps, would not persist. Hopefully, however, this dissertation will inspire some to persist (though the novel may be approached solely on the merit of a multitude of individual passages). For with persistence, patterns emerge, and the novel proves itself very tightly organized and controlled. Furthermore, the patterns prove themselves worthy of discovery.

Undoubtedly, Gaddis intends that his novel should require careful reading and evaluation. For here, as in life, perhaps the most worthwhile insights rarely are given freely but must be sought out with concentration and dedication for worthwhile and valid recognitions. Gaddis's Recognitions purports that patterns in reality exist if man works to find them. Even if the patterns discovered are existentially "created," they still can

be valid. Because, as the novel portrays, men may become what they see themselves as: men may see themselves as undignified nothings in a hopeless universe or as something better than that, and hope; but there is no hope in defeatism. Only with a positive attitude, that includes a quest for dignity and love, may mankind endure and redeem itself. In fact, since counterfeiting of reality may bring it closer to perfection, today has the potential of being the best period in man's history.

All this is not to make a god out of Gaddis, however, as Gaddis himself would maintain. For by parodying himself and his novel he shows his awareness of "both the force and the flaw" (p. 124) that must exist in the attempt at a masterpiece. Yet this dissertation does intend to say that William Gaddis is one of America's most commendable artists. The Recognitions combined with his only other novel to date, JR (which, in contrast to The Recognitions, deals predominantly with big business and politics and contains little more than dialogue), demonstrate a tremendously talented writer dramatizing an immensely comprehensive vision. Since little has been written about The Recognitions, and JR is all but untouched, certainly more study of his two books is needed. For Gaddis is a great novelist; and his two novels to date, equivalent in size and content to

several novels of his contemporaries, doubtless contain much more than literary criticism has thus far recognized.

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